

EVENT-BY-EVENT PREVIEW

Men's Swimming 200 METER BREASTSTROKE

BY JOHN LOHN

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Defending Champion: Kosuke Kitajima, JPN, 2:09.44

World Record Holder: Kosuke Kitajima, JPN, 2:07.51 (2008)

Most Titles: United States and Japan (5): USA—Robert Skelton (1924), Joseph Verdeur (1948), William Mulliken (1960), John Hencken (1972), Mike Barrowman (1992). JPN—Yoshiyuki Tsuruta (1928-32), Tetsuo Hamuri (1936), Masura Furukawa (1956), Kosuke Kitajima (2004)

Notable: The last two Olympic champions in the 200 breast have also won the 100 breast during the same Games. Kosuke Kitajima accomplished the feat in Athens in 2004, while Italy's Domenico Fioravanti turned the double at the 2000 Games in Sydney.

MEDAL CONTENDERS

Kosuke Kitajima, Japan: The reigning Olympic champ posted a comfortable victory four years ago, prevailing by more than a second over Hungary's Daniel Gyurta. Kitajima fell slightly off form following Athens, but the Japanese star is again a major factor. He won the world title last year with the world's fastest time (2:09.80), and he's taken it to another level this year with his 2:07.51 world record in June. With Brendan Hansen not qualifying for the 200 breast at the U.S. Trials, Kitajima's road to a repeat got that much easier.

Scott Spann, USA: Spann used a huge breakthrough performance at the U.S. Trials to become only the second American ever to break 2:10. With a strong finish, he grabbed first place in 2:09.97. After Kitajima at 2:07.51, there are five swimmers bunched together with 2:09s swum this year. Remaining composed at his

first Olympics will be a key in the hunt for a medal.

Eric Shanteau, USA: It was one thing to upset American record holder Brendan Hansen and qualify for the U.S. Olympic team in the 200 breast when he finished second at U.S. Trials in 2:10.36. But it was quite another when he revealed later that he is battling testicular cancer. Although he has been advised to have surgery soon, the doctors have given him the OK to train for Beijing as he continues to be monitored closely. Shanteau ranked fourth in the world last year (2:10.65), and he's hoping to earn a medal in his first Olympics.

Daniel Gyurta, Hungary: Still a teenager, Gyurta was only 15 years old when he won the silver medal in the 200 breast in Athens. The Hungarian is the latest elite breaststroker from his country, and is known for closing in on the competition down the stretch. Even though he finished sixth at Worlds last year (2:11.62) and

comes to Beijing with a 2008 best time of 2:12.44, Gyurta should be viewed as a medal contender once again.

Brenton Rickard, Australia: The Australian was primarily known for his exploits in the 100 breast until last year, when he won the silver medal in the 200 at Worlds. His 2:10.99 ended up as the sixth-fastest mark of the year, and he has since improved to 2:09.51, which makes him a factor for a medal.

Other Challengers: Russia's **Grigory Falko** has a best time this year of 2:09.64, while France's **Hugues Duboscq** (2:09.72) and Norway's **Alexander Dale Oen** (2:09.74) have also been in the 2:09-range. Duboscq and Dale Oen are equally proficient in the 100 breast, and could be multi-medal winners. The best from Great Britain is **Kris Gilchrist** (2:10.44), while Canada will count on **Mike Brown** (2:11.01). In addition to Kitajima, Japan has **Yuuta Suenaga**, who qualified second at Trials in 2:10.17. ♦

