

EVENT-BY-EVENT PREVIEW

Men's Swimming 200 METER BUTTERFLY

BY JOHN LOHN

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Defending Champion: Michael Phelps, USA, 1:54.04

World Record Holder: Michael Phelps, USA, 1:52.09 (2007)

Most Titles: United States (8): William Yorzyk (1956), Michael Troy (1960), Carl Robie (1968), Mark Spitz (1972), Mike Bruner (1976), Mel Stewart (1992), Tom Malchow (2000), Michael Phelps (2004)

Notable: The world record of Michael Phelps, produced at last year's World Championships in Melbourne, is 1.77 seconds faster than the second-fastest performer in history, Gil Stovall. That's an incredible amount of time for any event at the world-class level.

MEDAL CONTENDERS

Michael Phelps, USA: The reigning Olympic titlist is expected to make it back-to-back trips to the top step of the podium. Phelps has established a gap between himself and the competition that is difficult to fathom. When Phelps captured the world title last year (1:52.09), he won by more than three seconds and sliced nearly two seconds off his previous world record. At the U.S. Trials, he just missed his world record by clocking 1:52.20.

Gil Stovall, USA: The University of Georgia product was sensational through each of the three rounds at the U.S. Trials, but he saved his best effort for last. Storming down the last lap, Stovall slipped ahead of Davis Tarwater to touch in 1:53.86. That effort made him the second-fastest performer in the history of the event.

Pawel Korzeniowski, Poland: The Polish standout was the world champion in 2005 (in the absence of Phelps) and ranked second in the world in 2007 with a best time of 1:54.93. Although he finished sixth at Worlds (1:55.87)

last year, he bounced back this year with a silver-medal finish at Europeans in a personal-best 1:54.38 to become history's fourth-fastest performer.

Wu Peng, China: Count on the host-nation crowd getting behind Wu, who has been a steady presence in the world rankings for several years. He finished sixth four years ago in Athens, and just last year, he won the silver medal at Worlds with a 1:55.13. That outing placed Wu in the No. 4 spot in the world rankings. Earlier this year, he was timed in 1:54.82 for a national record. It wouldn't be surprising to see the Chinese swimmer excel on his home soil (water?) and wear either the silver or bronze medal.

Ryuichi Shibata and Takeshi Matsuda, Japan: Four years after Takashi Yamamoto supplied Japan with a medal in this event, Shibata and Matsuda provide a strong combination in the chase for another podium spot. Shibata, the top qualifier at the Japanese Trials in April (1:55.57), was

one of three men to dip under 1:55 last year, doing so by the slimmest of margins (1:54.99). Matsuda, meanwhile, has emerged as one of the best performers in the world, setting an Asian record of 1:54.42 at the Japan Open in June.

Other Challengers: From New Zealand, **Moss Burmester** has a chance to make a major mark for his country. He was ranked sixth in the world in 2007 (1:55.35), and he's gotten faster this year, going 1:54.99 for a Commonwealth record at the New Zealand Trials in March. A Brazilian, **Kaio Almeida**, is the top South American contender and was rated seventh in the world last year (1:55.45). He has been 1:55.14 in 2008. Finally, Russia's **Nikolay Skvortsov** has been around the international block and owns a best time this year of 1:54.65 in winning the bronze medal at the European Champs. ♦



ABOVE » Gil Stovall, USA

[PHOTO BY PETER H. BICK]