

EVENT-BY-EVENT PREVIEW

Men's Swimming 200 METER FREESTYLE

BY JOHN LOHN

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Defending Champion: Ian Thorpe, AUS, 1:44.71

World Record Holder: Michael Phelps, USA, 1:43.86 (2007)

Most Titles: Australia (4): Fred Lane (1900), Mike Wenden (1968), Duncan Armstrong (1988), Ian Thorpe (2004)

Notable: The 2000 Olympic champion, Pieter van den Hoogenband, indicated at last year's World Championships that he is no longer going to contest the 200 free in major international competition. That indication from the Dutch star followed his silver-medal finish behind Michael Phelps. It was a white flag-waving by van den Hoogenband, who is the defending two-time Olympic champ in the 100 free. However, Hoogie went 1:45.96 in June—the fifth-fastest time this year.

MEDAL CONTENDERS

Michael Phelps, USA: Four years ago, Phelps was the bronze medalist in Athens behind Ian Thorpe and Pieter van den Hoogenband, but now he has taken the event—like he's done with many others—to a new stratosphere. En route to gold at the World Champs in Melbourne last year, Phelps set a world record of 1:43.86, taking down Thorpe's 1:44.06 standard from 2001 that was once seen as otherworldly. At Trials, he challenged that mark with a 1:44.10. Over time, Phelps has proven he can do just about anything in the pool. As the heavy favorite for gold, don't be surprised if Phelps takes this event to 1:43-low.

Peter Vanderkaay, USA: Ranked second in the world last year with a 1:45.45, Vanderkaay is an obvious challenger for a podium position. Training with Phelps and other

prominent names at Club Wolverine, Vanderkaay is well prepared for Beijing and likely has a sub-1:45 performance within his grasp. He earned his second Olympic invitation by placing second at the U.S. Trials in 1:45.85.

Tae Hwan Park, South Korea: The South Korean teenager has emerged as an international standout in the middle-distance freestyles, his best event being the 400 free. While Park ranked fourth in the world last year (1:46.73), he was the bronze medalist at Worlds, placing behind Phelps and van den Hoogenband. He's since gotten faster, clocking 1:46.26 in April.

Kenrick Monk, Australia: A rising force from Australia, Monk checked in with the sixth-fastest time in the world last year and just missed grabbing a medal at the Worlds, where he placed fourth in front of his home nation. The 20-year-old qualified for the Olympics with a 1:47.10 at Trials, finishing behind Grant Hackett, who elected not to swim the event in Beijing.

Amaury Leveaux, France: There isn't a man in the world who can match the Frenchman's range from the 50 (21.38) through the 200 free. Part of a strong French contingent bound for Beijing—one that hopes to win gold in the 400 free relay—Leveaux set a national record in the 200 with a

1:46.54 at the French Trials in April.

Other Challengers: Paul Biedermann of Germany has enjoyed a breakthrough year—one that has put him among the potential finalists with his national record 1:46.37. From South Africa, **Jean Basson** (University of Arizona) set a national record 1:45.85, tied for the second-fastest time this year among those who will be competing in the event at Beijing. Also, keep an eye on Canadian **Colin Russell** (1:46.99) and China's **Zhang Lin** (1:47.63), who will have the host nation behind him. Russian youngster **Danila Izotov**, who was born in 1991 and has been 1:46.65, figures to be just tapping into his potential. ♦



[PHOTO BY PETER H. BICK]

ABOVE » Michael Phelps, USA