

# EVENT-BY-EVENT PREVIEW

## Men's Swimming

# 4 X 100 METER FREESTYLE RELAY

BY JOHN LOHN

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Defending Champion:** South Africa (Roland Schoeman, Lyndon Ferns, Darian Townsend, Ryk Neethling), 3:13.17

**World Record Holder:** United States (Michael Phelps, Neil Walker, Cullen Jones, Jason Lezak), 3:12.46 (2006)

**Most Titles:** United States (7): 1964-68-72-84-88-92-96

**Notable:** The United States won the first seven 400 freestyle relays in which it competed (the U.S. boycott the 1980 Olympics), but has finished out of the gold-medal position during the past two Games. In 2000, Australia secured the gold medal on its home turf, while four years ago in Athens, Roland Schoeman guided South Africa to the top spot.

### MEDAL CONTENDERS

**United States:** Heading into the U.S. Trials, there was considerable discussion concerning the Americans' ability to win the gold medal, especially since France looked so strong. However, the events of Omaha—where three athletes went 47-point compared to only one for France—clearly showed that the United States should be in the running to reclaim the gold. Michael Phelps (47.92), who only raced the prelims at Trials, figures to be the choice for lead-off, as was the case at last year's Worlds. Joining him should be American record holder Jason Lezak (47.58) and Garrett Weber-Gale (47.78). The final spot for the championship final will be selected from Cullen Jones, Ben Wildman-Tobriner, Nathan Adrian, Matt Grevers and possibly Ryan Lochte.

**France:** The French have been chattered about for months now, and for good reason. France is expected to arrive in Beijing with a loaded lineup in this event, headlined by world



record holder Alain Bernard (47.50), who is a threat for individual medals in both sprints. Also on the relay will be Fabien Gilot (48.02), Amaury Leveaux (48.38)—equally impressive as a sprinter and a 200 freestyler—and Fred Bousquet (48.52). All of France's swimmers should be able to deliver splits in the 47-second range. There's a strong chance that a time of 3:10—two seconds faster than the current world mark—will be needed for gold.

**South Africa:** The defending Olympic champ has been somewhat overlooked due to the hype surrounding the U.S. and France. Still, the South Africans have the talent to win the gold medal for a second straight Olympiad, especially since they return their entire squad from Athens. Roland Schoeman and Ryk Neethling are veteran performers who know what it takes to get the job done. The same can be said for Lyndon Ferns and Darian Townsend, the remainder of the group that trains at the University of Arizona. If South

Africa can get its four guys on the same page, look for it to be battling for gold.

**Australia:** The Aussies will push for a medal behind Eamon Sullivan, the surging sprint star who will try to win the 50 and 100 freestyles. Matt Targett will also be a key contributor with other relay spots probably going to Andrew Lauterstein and Ashley Callus. If Australia is within striking distance of a medal when Sullivan enters the water, look out.

**Other Challengers:** The dropoff from the aforementioned four nations to the remainder of the field seems to be sizable. **Russia** is led by Evgeni Lagunov, who has been 48-low this year. He'll have support from Andrey Grechin. Also factoring into the championship final should be **Italy**, second at last year's World Champs, and **Sweden**, led by Stefan Nystrand. **Canada** is headlined by Brent Hayden, and **Brazil's** ace is Cesar Cielo. ♦