

EVENT-BY-EVENT PREVIEW

Men's Swimming 400 METER INDIVIDUAL MEDLEY

BY JOHN LOHN

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Defending Champion: Michael Phelps, USA, 4:08.26.

World Record Holder: Michael Phelps, USA, 4:05.25 (2008)

Most Titles: United States (6): Richard Roth (1964), Charles Hickcox (1968), Rod Strachan (1976), Tom Dolan (1996-2000), Michael Phelps (2004)

Notable: At the 1972 Games in Munich, Sweden's Gunnar Larsson captured the gold medal over American Tim McKee. While both men touched in 4:31.98, the race was decided to the thousandth of a second, with Larsson prevailing, 4:31.981 to McKee's effort of 4:31.983. Today, a finish of that sort would result in a shared medal.

MEDAL CONTENDERS

Michael Phelps, USA: It all starts with the man who is the defending champion, world record holder and, probably, the greatest swimmer ever to walk the face of the earth. Four years ago, Phelps opened his Olympic campaign with gold in this event, setting a global standard in the process. He finished the Athens Games with six gold medals and two bronze medals. Phelps will be the favorite to win a second straight title in this discipline, having lowered his world record to 4:05.25 at the U.S. Trials. With the 400 IM being the first event on the program, Phelps will certainly want to start his meet in commanding fashion. The way to do that is by winning gold right off the bat.

Ryan Lochte, USA: If not for Phelps, Lochte would be considered the best swimmer in the world. As it is, he's the No. 2 gun and a big part of the American arsenal. At the U.S. Trials, Lochte, who won silver at the 2007 World Champs, gave Phelps all

sorts of trouble in the event before touching in 4:06.08, the second-fastest time ever.

Laszlo Cseh,

Hungary: The Hungarian has a world title to his credit from 2005, when he prevailed in the distance medley in Montreal. Earlier this summer, while competing in the Mare Nostrum Series, Cseh clocked 4:07.96 for a European record. That won't push Phelps or Lochte, but Cseh is certainly the headliner for bronze.

Luca

Marin,

Italy: What's sad about the Italian is that he's been primarily known for being Laure Manaudou's ex-boyfriend. *Newsflash:* this guy is one heck of a swimmer, confirmed by his bronze medal in the 400 IM at last year's Worlds (4:09.88) and a No. 3 world ranking for 2007. Marin hasn't been overly impressive in recent months (4:16.69 for third place at the Europeans), but his credentials suggest a run at a medal.

Thiago Pereira, Brazil: Pereira has become a sports icon in Brazil, and he'll have an entire nation following his exploits—not bad for a non-soccer player. Last year, he won the gold medal at the Pan American Games in 4:11.14, a South American record. The performance opened everyone's eyes



ABOVE » Ryan Lochte, USA

[PHOTO BY PETER H. BICK]

and made Pereira worth mentioning in terms of Beijing and medal possibilities. He might be better suited to the 200 IM, but an appearance in the Olympic final in the longer medley is likely.

Other Challengers: Great Britain's **Thomas Haffield** has the fourth-fastest time this year (4:12.59) and is looking to contend for a medal. From Tunisia, **Ous Mellouli** could be a factor—if he decides to swim the event over the 400 free. He clocked 4:11.68 at Worlds last year, but the time was stricken from the record for a positive doping test. Fortunately for him, his penalty does not interfere with the Olympics. ♦