

## Men's Swimming 4 X 100 METER MEDLEY RELAY

BY JOHN LOHN

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Defending Champion:** United States (Aaron Peirsol, Brendan Hansen, Ian Crocker, Jason Lezak), 3:30.68

**World Record Holder:** United States (Aaron Peirsol, Brendan Hansen, Ian Crocker, Jason Lezak), 3:30.68 (2004)

**Most Titles:** United States (11): 1960-64-68-72-76-84-88-92-96, 2000-04

**Notable:** The only year the United States hasn't won the Olympic title in the event was 1980, when the USA boycotted the Games. That year, Australia captured the gold medal.

### MEDAL CONTENDERS

**United States:** The United States could have the two best medley relays in the world, but it can only enter one in Beijing. Aaron Peirsol (back) and Brendan Hansen (breast)—both world record holders in their respective 100 events—will handle the first half. Then comes the question: on butterfly, do you go with world record holder Ian Crocker with history's fastest fly split or Michael Phelps, the defending Olympic and world champ in the 100 fly? If Crocker goes fly, Phelps is available for anchor. If Phelps swims fly, look for Jason Lezak or Garrett Weber-Gale to swim freestyle. Either way, look for a world record.

**Australia:** Prospects for the Aussies looked good after their stellar swims at Olympic Trials. Ashley Delaney has been 53.68 in the 100 back, while Hayden Stoeckel has gone 53.78. Brenton Rickard (1:00.04) should follow in breaststroke. Andrew Lauterstein broke the 52-second barrier in March and will be formidable on the fly leg, which leads into Eamon Sullivan and his superb sprint talents. If Sullivan is within striking distance of second

or third when he dives in, consider the Aussies good to go for the podium.

**Russia:** Russia claimed the gold medal at the World Short Course Championships. Arkady Vyatchanin has been among the premier backstrokers for several years. Look for Grigory Falko to handle the breast leg, though he'll have a difficult time staying with the top swimmers. Evgeni Korotyshkin is the favorite for the fly leg (he's been sub-52), and Evgeni Lagunov is a possibility for anchor.

**Japan:** The Japanese had the best time in the world last year. Backstroke belongs to Tomomi Morita, a man who has been sub-54. The strongest leg, of course, is breaststroke, where Kosuke Kitajima can dip under 59 seconds. Masayuki Kishida is a sub-52 butterfly. The problem for Japan is the lack of a dynamite freestyler.

**Great Britain:** The British squad has to be feeling good after their impressive Olympic Trials. Liam Tancock is one of the best backstrokers in the world, and Chris Cook appears headed for the breaststroke leg, coming off a sub-minute effort. Michael Rock was 52-low in the fly at Trials. The question is the freestyle leg.

**Other Challengers:** While the **South Africans** are known for their



[PHOTO BY JERRY LAMPEN, REUTERS]

ABOVE » (From left) Ian Crocker, Aaron Peirsol, Brendan Hansen and Jason Lezak (in pool), USA (after world record in 2004)

400 free relay—which won gold in Athens—they'll have a pretty solid medley relay. Gerhard Zandberg on the backstroke and Cameron Van Der Burgh on the breaststroke will take care of the first half of the relay. It looks like Lyndon Ferns will be the butterfly choice, with Roland Schoeman powering home on the freestyle leg. The **Canadians** could make a run at the final, although they'll need something better than 54-high from Matt Hawes on the backstroke leg. Mike Brown and Matthieu Bois are the breaststroke options, and Joe Bartoch is the likely choice to swim fly. Canada's strength is in the freestyle, where Brent Hayden is a world-class performer. ♦