

## Men's Swimming 400 METER FREESTYLE

BY JOHN LOHN

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Defending Champion:** Ian Thorpe, AUS, 3:43.10

**World Record Holder:** Ian Thorpe, AUS, 3:40.08 (2002)

**Most Titles:** United States (10): Charles Daniels (1904), Norman Ross (1920), Johnny Weissmuller (1924), Buster Crabbe (1932), Jack Medica (1936), William Smith (1948), Don Schollander (1964), Mike Burton (1968), Brian Goodell (1976), George DiCarlo (1984)

**Notable:** Although the United States has won more titles in the event than any other nation, an American hasn't won the gold medal during the past five Olympiads.

### MEDAL CONTENDERS

**Tae Hwan Park, South Korea:** Park is one of the sport's surging stars, a teenager with impressive range from the 200 to the 1500 freestyle. He won the world title last year in 3:44.30 and has been 3:43.59 this year. Park has stated his intentions to break Ian Thorpe's world record, but a three-second drop is a big chore. Still, there's no doubt he will be among the top challengers for gold.

**Grant Hackett, Australia:** The 400 free silver medalist at Athens has rebounded from a sluggish showing in 2007. Although he won the bronze medal at Worlds (3:45.43), Hackett wasn't himself. That's no longer the case. He has fully recovered from shoulder woes, and went 3:43.15 at the Aussie Trials. It wouldn't be surprising if the 1500 king grabbed the gold in the 400.

**Larsen Jensen, USA:** Jensen, who placed fourth four years ago, is best known for his skill in the 1500. Heading into the U.S. Trials, Jensen was mentioned in this event, but only

after Peter Vanderkaay, Erik Vendt and Klete Keller. Then he went out and won the thing, setting an American record of 3:43.53. Jensen showed moxie in the race, taking command early and forcing the field to track him down—a difficult chore, considering his endurance.

**Peter Vanderkaay, USA:** After missing out on an individual medal at last year's Worlds, Vanderkaay has been surging. He had a tremendous showing at nationals and carried that form to an American record in the 400 free earlier this year. He was second to Jensen at Trials, but his 3:43.73 certainly puts him in the mix for a medal. Remember, this guy is from one of the premier training groups in the world, and his best may be yet to come.

**Ous Mellouli, Tunisia:** The Tunisian standout had been off the radar for most of the year due to an 18-month suspension for using the banned substance, Adderall. Mellouli was using the drug to help with his concentration for his academic studies. His ban having ended, Mellouli could be a contender if he contests this event instead of the 400 IM. He was 3:44.79 in June. Although the result was vacated, he finished second at last year's Worlds in 3:45.12.

**Yuri Prilukov, Russia:** The Russian is equally efficient in the 400 and



[PHOTO BY JERRY LAMPEN, REUTERS]

ABOVE » Tae Hwan Park, KOR

1500 events, and he's expected to be a finalist in Beijing in both races. At last year's Worlds, Prilukov clocked 3:45.47 for fourth. He won this year's Europeans in 3:45.10.

**Other Challengers:** Also figuring into the medal picture will be China's **Zhang Lin**, who has been 3:44.97 this year and will have the home crowd in his corner. Italy's **Massi Rosolino**, the silver medalist at the Euro Champs, has been 3:45.19 in 2008, and Aussie **Craig Stevens** was seventh at last year's Worlds. Keep an eye on Japan's **Takeshi Matsuda** and Germany's **Paul Biedermann**, along with Canadian **Ryan Cochrane** and Italian **Federico Colbertaldo**. ♦