

EVENT-BY-EVENT PREVIEW

Men's Swimming 50 METER FREESTYLE

BY JOHN LOHN

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Defending Champion: Gary Hall Jr., USA, 21.93

World Record Holder: Eamon Sullivan, AUS, 21.28 (2008)

Most Titles: United States (4): Matt Biondi (1988), Anthony Ervin (tie, 2000), Gary Hall Jr. (tie, 2000; 2004)

Notable: At the beginning of this year, Russia's Alex Popov was the world record holder at 21.64—a time that had stood for nearly eight years. How things have changed. There have already been 10 performances in 2008 faster than Popov's time, with the world record now at 21.28—at one time a difficult number to fathom for the event.

MEDAL CONTENDERS

Eamon Sullivan, Australia: At the Australian Trials in March, Sullivan shredded the world record, registering a jaw-dropping 21.28. The Australian was fifth at last year's World Championships, but that effort hardly matters now. Sullivan is exactly what the Aussie men needed—a young star who can carry the nation's sprint banner for years to come.

Alain Bernard, France: The Frenchman set world records in the 50 and 100 freestyles at the European Championships in March. His 100 free record still stands. Bernard, who ranked No. 1 in the world last year with a 21.76, now has a best of 21.50. Once on the outside of the elite, Bernard is among the men to beat.

Amaury Leveaux, France: It's rare to see a freestyler with dynamite speed in the 50 and the ability to produce an exceptional 200. Leveaux, however, fits the bill. He is the second-fastest man in history in the one-lap dash (21.38) and has gone 1:46.54 this year in the 200—a time that would have ranked fourth globally in 2007.

Garrett Weber-Gale, USA: The University of Texas product threw his name into the equation when he delivered a time of 21.93 at the All-American Invitational. Then he went to the U.S. Trials and ripped an American record 21.47. That time was supported by a 47-point effort in the 100. Weber-Gale has arrived and will be a medal player.

Ben Wildman-Tobriner, USA: The reigning world champion put his stamp on the international scene in 2007 in Melbourne. He solidified his status as a top sprinter at the U.S. Trials when he placed second in 21.65. Having already delivered once in international competition, Wildman-Tobriner needs to be regarded as podium-ready.

Cesar Cielo, Brazil: The former Auburn star is the fastest man in history in the 50 yard free, and he's the reigning Pan American Games titlist. Cielo produced a best time of 21.84 in 2007, and he's been 21.75 this year. The Brazilian was sixth at Worlds last year, and an appearance in the Olympic final is likely.

Stefan Nystrand, Sweden: Nystrand was ranked No. 5 in the world last year with a Swedish record 21.93. At Worlds, he took home the bronze medal. While Nystrand is an elite 50 freestyler, his best chance at a

medal might be in the 100 free, where he ranked No. 1 in 2007.

Roland Schoeman, South Africa: You can't discount the South African, the man who was the bronze medalist in the 50 free in Athens in 2004. Schoeman was seventh at the World Champs last year, but he was the world champ in 2005 with a career-best 21.69.

Other Challengers: Among the other names that could push for a spot in the final are Poland's **Bart Kizierowski**, sixth in the world in 2007. Also keep an eye on Great Britain's ageless **Mark Foster**, born in 1970 and who has been 21.96 this year. ♦



[PHOTO BY MICK TSIKAS, REUTERS]

ABOVE » Eamon Sullivan, AUS