

# EVENT-BY-EVENT PREVIEW

## Women's Swimming 100 METER BACKSTROKE

BY JOHN LOHN

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Defending Champion:** Natalie Coughlin, USA, 1:00.37

**World Record Holder:** Natalie Coughlin, USA, 58.97 (2008)

**Most Titles:** United States (9): Sybil Bauer (1924), Eleanor Holm (1932), Lynn Burke (1960), Cathy Ferguson (1964), Kaye Hall (1968), Melissa Belote (1972), Theresa Andrews (1984), Beth Botsford (1996), Natalie Coughlin (2004)

**Notable:** There has never been a repeat champion since the event debuted at the 1924 Olympics in Paris. Natalie Coughlin will have a chance to change that.

### MEDAL CONTENDERS

**Natalie Coughlin, USA:** The reigning Olympic champ has dominated the women's 100 back since 2001. She was the first woman under a minute and now the only woman to break 59 seconds after clocking 58.97 at the U.S. Trials. If Coughlin is in prime condition, she'll be tough to deny in Beijing.

**Kirsty Coventry, Zimbabwe:** Coventry is best known for her ability in the 200 back, where she is a former world champion. But she also is a big-time talent in the 100, as evidenced by her No. 2 world ranking in 2007 (59.85). Her 59.42 from last March ranks fifth among performers all-time, and she also has a victory over Coughlin at the 2005 World Champs to her credit. Look for Coventry to contend as well in both IMs and the 200 back.

**Laure Manaudou, France:** The Frenchwoman was the bronze medalist at the 2004 Games in Athens, placing behind Coughlin and Coventry. At last year's Worlds, Manaudou was the silver medalist in 59.87. That effort

arrived amid a stacked slate in which she also won the 200 and 400 freestyles and took silver in the 800 free. Look for Manaudou (59.50 in March) to contend for a medal.

**Reiko Nakamura, Japan:** The bronze medalist in the 100 and 200 backstrokes at last year's Worlds,

Nakamura ranked fourth in the world with a best time of 1:00.29. Like many others, she has joined the sub-minute club, with her best time now the Asian record at 59.82.

**Emily Seebohm, Australia:**

The Australian teenager made her name known on the international stage at Worlds, where she finished fourth in 1:00.52. Born in 1993, Seebohm obviously is just tapping into her talent and has dropped all the way to 59.59. She's another in a stacked field who should chase a medal.

**Hanae Ito, Japan:** Another Japanese standout, Ito ranked sixth in the world last year with a 1:00.62. She's lowered that time by a large margin, going 59.83 at the Japan Trials in April. A spot in the championship final makes sense.

**Margaret Hoelzer, USA:** While her best event is the 200 back, Hoelzer secured a spot in the 100 back by placing second at the U.S. Trials, ahead of Hayley McGregory, who will not be



[PHOTO BY PETER H. BUCK]

ABOVE » Natalie Coughlin, USA

making the trip to Beijing despite the fact that she is the second fastest performer all-time. Hoelzer will be seeded second in Beijing with her 59.21, an effort that should contend for a medal if she can duplicate the performance. Her endurance in the event makes her dangerous if she's close down the stretch.

**Other Challengers:** Anastasia Zueva, a Russian born in 1990, clocked 59.41 at the Europeans in March, making her the No. 3 seed coming into Beijing. Meanwhile, China will have Zhao Jing (59.81) as its top hope. The other Australian in the field is Sophie Edington, whose 59.84 is just ahead of the 59.89 entry time of Great Britain's Gemma Spofforth. ♦