

EVENT-BY-EVENT PREVIEW

Women's Swimming 100 METER BREASTSTROKE

BY JOHN LOHN

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Defending Champion: Luo Xuejuan, CHN, 1:06.64

World Record Holder: Leisel Jones, AUS, 1:05.09 (2006)

Most Titles: United States and East Germany (2): USA—Catherine Carr (1972), Megan Quann (2000). GDR—Hannelore Anke (1976), Ute Geweniger (1980)

Notable: China's Luo Xuejuan will not defend her Olympic crown, having opted for retirement last year at the recommendation of doctors. Luo entered retirement due to a heart condition that threatened her health if she pushed through with training for the 2008 Olympic Games in her homeland.

MEDAL CONTENDERS

Leisel Jones, Australia: Jones, the two-time defending world champion and the bronze medalist in Athens, has redefined the 100 meter breast. She's the only woman under 1:06, and she's done it eight times—most recently in June with a 1:05.34, her second-fastest performance. Anything less than a gold medal in Beijing would be surprising for a woman who has eliminated the big-race jitters that once haunted her. Could she become the first woman to clock a 1:04?

Tarneer White, Australia: Lethal Leisel isn't the only Aussie star in the breaststroke, thanks to a breakthrough performance by White at her Olympic Trials. She nearly cracked the 1:06 barrier at Trials, going 1:06.04 to become the world's No. 2 all-time performer. A repeat showing would place White firmly in the medal mix, and a 1-2 Aussie finish is quite possible.

Megan Jendrick, USA: One of the best stories of the U.S. Olympic Trials, Jendrick earned her second

Olympic invitation after an eight-year hiatus. In 2000, she won the gold medal in the 100 breast as Megan Quann. She narrowly missed making the 2004 squad, but forged ahead and saw her determination and hard work rewarded by advancing to Beijing. Jendrick was 1:07-low at Trials and has the ability to unleash a 1:06.

Rebecca Soni,

USA: Already on the U.S. squad in the 200 breaststroke, Soni was added in the 100 breast after Jessica Hardy tested positive for a banned substance.

Soni is a definite medal threat and went a personal-best 1:06.87 in the semis at Trials before finishing fourth in finals. If she can find that speed again, a medal is within reach.

Sarah Poewe, Germany: The German, by way of South Africa, delivered a strong showing at her nationals in April. Poewe touched the wall in 1:07.10, among the best times in the world this year. However, if Poewe possesses any thoughts of earning a medal, she'll have to slice some considerable time off that effort.

Kate Haywood and Kirsty Balfour, Great Britain: The British will have a pair of solid breaststrokers entered in Beijing. At the British Trials, Haywood, who placed seventh at last year's World Championships, won in 1:07.84 to earn her place at



ABOVE » Leisel Jones, AUS

the Games (after clocking 1:07.56 in prelims for a national record). The other slot will be occupied by Balfour (1:08.05), fifth at Worlds and also a qualifier in the 200 breast. Her personal best is 1:07.67 from the semifinals at Worlds.

Other Challengers: Japan's top entry is **Nanaka Tamura**, who checked in at 1:07.58 at the Japanese Trials in April. She'll be joined in the fight for a championship-heat berth by the Ukraine's **Anna Khlistunova**, the bronze medalist (1:07.27) at last year's World Champs, and Canada's **Annamay Pierse** (1:07.78p from last year's Pan-Ams). Russian youngster **Yuliya Efimova**, 16, went 1:07.10 in June for a national record. ♦