

# EVENT-BY-EVENT PREVIEW

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

BY JOHN LOHN

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Defending Champion:** Australia (Giaan Rooney, Leisel Jones, Petria Thomas, Jodie Henry), 3:57.32

**World Record Holder:** Australia (Emily Seebohm, Leisel Jones, Jessicah Schipper, Libby Lenton), 3:55.74 (2007)

**Most Titles:** United States (8): 1960-64-68-72-84-92-96, 2000

**Notable:** When Australia captured the gold medal in Athens in 2004, it ended a stranglehold on the top spot by the United States and East Germany. Before the Aussie women prevailed, the United States and East Germany had accounted for all 11 Olympic titles in the event.

### MEDAL CONTENDERS

**Australia:** The ladies from Down Under are formidable in every stroke and are the clear favorites to win the gold medal. Emily Seebohm is Australia's record holder in the 100 back (59.59) and is the seventh-fastest performer all-time. Leisel Jones, the world record holder, will follow in the 100 breast (1:05.09), and she's nearly two seconds ahead of the next fastest swimmer who will be competing in Beijing. Jessicah Schipper, the second-fastest active swimmer in the 100 fly (57.15), could swim the third leg, with Libby Trickett, the only woman under 53 seconds in the 100 free (52.88), handling the anchor. Or, Australia could go with Trickett on the fly leg (56.81) and Cate Campbell on freestyle (53.30). Based on best times, Option A gives you a 3:54.71, and Option B adds up to 3:54.79—either which way, a world record!

**United States:** The Americans still have questions to answer. The backstroke leg has been the domain of world record holder Natalie Coughlin, but her versatility could make her an option for the butterfly or freestyle legs, particularly with Margaret Hoelzer a



ABOVE » (From left) Emily Seebohm, Jessicah Schipper, Libby Lenton (bottom) and Leisel Jones, AUS (after world record in 2007)

viable option on the leadoff leg. With American record holder Jessica Hardy out of the picture for testing positive for clenbuterol, Megan Jendrick or Rebecca Soni will swim breaststroke. The freestyle leg will hinge upon the use of Coughlin, but Dara Torres and Lacey Nymeyer are the primary options. If Coughlin is used on backstroke, Christine Magnuson is the probable fly choice.

**Great Britain:** Expectations for the British have skyrocketed since their stellar performances at Trials. Most likely, Gemma Spofforth seems to be the top backstroke prospect (59.89), followed by Kate Haywood in breast (1:07.56). On the butterfly leg, Great Britain is probably looking at Jemma Lowe (57.78), who qualified in both the 100 and 200 fly. She should make the exchange for the freestyle anchor with either rising teen standout Francesca Halsall (54.53) or Caitlin McClatchey (54.31).

**Russia:** The Russian squad undoubtedly has a strong front half of the medley

relay. Backstroker Anastasia Zueva has been 59.41 and will be in the fight for a medal individually. She'll be followed by teenager Yuliya Efimova, improving rapidly on the international scene. Natalia Sutiagina is a top-ranked Russian butterflyer, but there doesn't seem to be a hammer for the freestyle anchor.

**France:** With Laure Manaudou a sub-minute backstroker, the French are in good shape off the start. More, Aurore Mongel (fly) and Alena Popchanka (freestyle) are solid legs. The weak point for France is breaststroke. The likely performer is Anne-Sophie Le Paranthoen, but she simply doesn't compare on an international basis with the top guns.

**Other Challengers:** Japan has three solid legs, but the lack of a freestyler is an issue. Canada and China are also worthy of consideration for the final. Canada must get improvement from Julia Wilkinson in the backstroke to have an impact. China was third at last year's Worlds. ♦