

EVENT-BY-EVENT PREVIEW

Women's Swimming 400 METER FREESTYLE

BY JOHN LOHN

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Defending Champion: Laure Manaudou, FRA, 4:05.34

World Record Holder: Federica Pellegrini, ITA, 4:01.53 (2008)

Most Titles: United States (9): Martha Norelius (1924-28), Helene Madison (1932), Ann Curtis (1948), Chris von Saltza (1960), Virginia Duenkel (1964), Tiffany Cohen (1984), Janet Evans (1988), Brooke Bennett (2000)

Notable: The time of 4:03.85 that Janet Evans posted to win the 1988 crown in Seoul still stands as the Olympic record. Of course, that standard is likely living on borrowed time, considering who is competing in Beijing.

MEDAL CONTENDERS

Federica Pellegrini, Italy: Last year's fifth-place finisher at Worlds emerged as this year's Olympic favorite when she became the first and only woman to crack the 4:02 barrier en route to gold at the European Championships in March. However, because of the event's depth, no one is a lock for gold.

Laure Manaudou, France: The class of this event for a few years, Manaudou only finished second at the French Championships, where she was four seconds off her personal best of 4:02.13. The defending champion, though, can't be discounted because of one subpar performance. She's an aggressive athlete who will push the pace early and could make it an Olympic repeat.

Katie Hoff, USA: The American record holder, Hoff clocked 4:02.20 in February, then won at the U.S. Olympic Trials in 4:02.32. She was fourth at Worlds, but has improved significantly in this event. Look for Hoff to earn one of what should be

several medals in China.

Kate Ziegler, USA: Best known for her prowess in the 800 and 1500 freestyles, Ziegler is supremely talented in the 400 as well. She was sixth at last year's Worlds and went 4:04.24 to win at nationals last summer. At Trials, she took second in 4:03.92. Her finish is among the best in the sport and could carry Ziegler to the podium.

Otylia Jędrzejczak, Poland: She may be the former world record holder in the 200 fly, but she's also a force in the 200 and 400 freestyles. Jędrzejczak was the silver medalist in the 400 free in Athens and also placed second in the event at the 2007 World Championships with a personal-best 4:04.23. Count her as another member of a large group of medal contenders.

Linda Mackenzie and Bronte Barratt, Australia: The Australians boast an impressive 1-2 punch in the 400. Mackenzie, who finished eighth at Worlds, won at the Aussie Trials in 4:04.73, ahead of Barratt at 4:05.19.



Barratt has since improved to 4:04.57.

Rebecca Adlington and Jo Jackson, Great Britain: Watch out for the British girls—they're definitely on the move. They already showed their credentials at the British Trials in April (Adlington, 4:04.50; Jackson, 4:05.38), then improved at their nationals in July. Jackson—seventh at last year's Worlds—turned in a personal-best 4:04.81, while Adlington swam the fourth-fastest performance all-time (4:02.80).

Other Challengers: **Coralie Balmy** enters Beijing as the French champ who had a breakthrough swim of 4:04.15 at the Europeans in March. Romania's **Camelia Potec**—who actually beat Balmy at France's Olympic Trials—won the Olympic 200 free in Athens, and she's equally adept as a 400 freestyler. The bronze medal winner at Europeans, Potec's best is 4:05.62. ♦