

# EVENT-BY-EVENT PREVIEW

## Women's Swimming

### 50 METER FREESTYLE

BY JOHN LOHN

#### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Defending Champion:** Inge de Bruijn, NED, 24.58

**World Record Holder:** Libby Trickett, AUS, 23.97 (2008)

**Most Titles:** The Netherlands (2): Inge de Bruijn (2000-04)

**Notable:** The women's 50 freestyle has only been contested in Olympic competition since 1988. Inge de Bruijn, the two-time defending champion, is retired, so there will be some new blood on the top step of the podium. The only American to win the event was Amy Van Dyken in 1996.

#### MEDAL CONTENDERS

**Libby Trickett, Australia:** The reigning world champion will tackle a demanding schedule in Beijing, which will include contention for the sprint crown. At last year's World Champs, Trickett bested the field in the 50 free with a time of 24.53. She has since become the world record holder and only woman in history to break the 24-second barrier. She's the definitive favorite for gold.

**Dara Torres, USA:** Heading to her fifth Olympics, the 41-year-old set an American record in the event at last summer's national championships. She then broke the American standard twice at the U.S. Trials, including a 24.25 effort in the final. Torres is a feel-good and inspirational story, and she could add to her nine Olympic medals.

**Therese Alshammar, Sweden:** The veteran sprinter had a tremendous year in 2007, posting a time of 24.23 at the Paris Open and grabbing the silver medal at the World Championships. Alshammar has always excelled in 50-meter events, evidenced by her world title in the 50 fly. A run for a spot on the medal stand is expected.



#### Marleen Veldhuis, Netherlands:

The Dutch star has had a superb year in preparation for Beijing. Before Trickett went sub-24, she set the world record in the event, going 24.09 at the European Championships. Her strength in 2008 follows a quality 2007 campaign in which Veldhuis was the bronze medalist at Worlds. She finished 2007 as the second-quickest performer in the world (24.30).

**Britta Steffen, Germany:** The former world record holder in the 100 free, Steffen ranked sixth in the world last year in the 50 (24.66). At the 2007 Worlds, Steffen just missed out on a medal by placing fourth. At the German nationals in April, she stepped up her game and clocked 24.19, an effort that surely makes her a medal challenger.

**Cate Campbell, Australia:** One of the brightest young stars, Campbell, who turned 16 last May, opened some eyes in 2007 by clocking 24.48 during the Japan International. She seems just

now to be tapping into her potential, clocking times of 24.13 and 24.17 this year. It wouldn't be shocking at all if Campbell works her way into the gold-medal race.

**Kara Lynn Joyce, USA:** Due to Jessica Hardy's removal from the U.S. team as the result of her use of a banned substance, Joyce gets her chance to compete in an individual event. Her personal best is 24.59 from February of this year, and she has plenty of international experience. Joyce was fifth at last year's World Champs (24.83).

**Other Challengers:** France's **Malia Metella** was the silver medalist at the 2004 Olympics in Athens, but earning another medal in Beijing is a longshot. Metella was 10th in the world last year (24.99), and she was seventh at Worlds. This year, she has been 24.83. Also, watch Great Britain's **Francesca Halsall**, a rising teenager who has clocked 24.72 this year. ♦