

# EVENT-BY-EVENT PREVIEW

## Women's Swimming 800 METER FREESTYLE

BY JOHN LOHN

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Defending Champion:** Ai Shibata, JPN, 8:24.54

**World Record Holder:** Janet Evans, USA, 8:16.22 (1989)

**Most Titles:** United States (7): Debbie Meyer (1968), Keena Rothhammer (1972), Tiffany Cohen (1984), Janet Evans (1988-92), Brooke Bennett (1996-2000)

**Notable:** Janet Evans' world record from Tokyo in 1989 is the longest-standing global mark on the books and is more than two seconds faster than her closest pursuers.

### MEDAL CONTENDERS

**Katie Hoff, USA:** The American youngster—perhaps the most versatile swimmer in the world—proved herself in the 800 free at the U.S. nationals last summer when she swam 8:22.80, just behind the winning effort of Kate Ziegler. Since then, she has continued to improve (8:19.70 in April), and prevailed at Trials (8:20.81 in July). The key for Hoff, now a gold-medal favorite, is how she handles her incredible workload, which includes five individual events and the 800 free relay. Her mental toughness surely will help when she takes the blocks.

**Kate Ziegler, USA:** Although Ziegler is not the favorite to win gold, she's still more than capable of winning the event. The two-time world champion was the fastest in the world last year at 8:18.52 to become history's second-fastest performer in the event. At the U.S. Trials, Ziegler wasn't in peak form (8:25.38), but that should change come Beijing. Ziegler has a devastating finish, and if she's within striking distance, she has the ability to get to the wall first.

**Rebecca Adlington, Great Britain:** The British star has been surging on

the international scene. She holds the fastest time of the year at 8:19.22 from the British Trials in April. Considering that her time makes her the fourth fastest performer ever, and considering that two of those performers are not competing in the event at Beijing (Janet Evans and Laure Manaudou), it's easy to predict that she'll have a good chance to earn a spot on the podium.

**Ai Shibata, Japan:** The reigning Olympic champion ranked fourth in the world in 2007

with a best time of 8:23.76. At Worlds, she finished sixth with an off race of 8:31.73. Obviously, there won't be any room for a subpar showing in Beijing. As the defending champion, look for Shibata to be in the medal mix, although it very well could require a time under 8:20.

**Flavia Rigamonti, Switzerland:** The Swiss Miss is one of the top 1500 freestylers in the world, but since that event is not part of the women's Olympic program, she'll have to get the job done in a little more than half the distance. Rigamonti ranked No. 5 in the world in 2007, behind a swim of 8:25.59 at the World University Games.

**Alessia Filippi, Italy:** The Italian is a standout in the 400 IM, but her effort



of 8:20.70 in the 800 free in June puts her firmly in the medal equation.

**Erika Villaecija, Spain:** The Spaniard had a strong performance at the World Championships, where she touched in 8:27.59 for fourth place. Villaecija was timed in 8:24.08 at the European Championships, an outing that helped her international standing even further.

**Other Challengers:** Romania's **Camelia Potec** is long established on the global scene and has been 8:23.78 in 2008. Among the other individuals who could vie for a spot in the championship final are Aussie **Kylie Palmer** (8:24.30) and France's **Coralie Balmy** (8:25.63). ♦