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SPECIAL EDITION | MARCH 2015

MEN AT WORK

MEN'S NCAA D1 CHAMPIONSHIP PREVIEW



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California and Texas appear ready to renew their rivalry from last year's championships as the top two teams.

STORY BY **JEFF COMMINGS** • PHOTOS BY **PETER H. BICK**

A few misfires here and there can spell disaster for a team at the NCAA Division I Men's Swimming and Diving Championships. The University of Michigan found that out the hard way a year ago.

As the defending team champions, the Wolverines were expected to win another team title. But California and Texas had other plans. As Michigan slipped up in a couple of races on the meet's first day, the Golden Bears and Longhorns moved in for the kill, and changed the team race dynamic significantly.

Texas improved on nearly every seed by a significant margin, putting many swimmers in the top eight and scoring very high in all the relays. Cal, which was primed to place a close second to Michigan in pre-meet prognostications, won three relays and boasted individual victories by freshman phenom Ryan Murphy.

This month on the campus of the University of Iowa in Iowa City, the Golden Bears and Longhorns will renew their rivalry, with the team battle likely to be decided by fewer than 40 points. Cal won last year by 51 over Texas, thanks in part to a monster third day.

Diving could play a huge role in determining the team champion. Texas is likely to score big points in at least one diving event, which could negate Cal's strong presence in backstroke. Among the rest of the teams fighting for a spot in the top 10, relays will be the key.

Following are *Swimming World's* predictions for the top 10 finishes at this month's NCAAs, March 26-28:

1. CALIFORNIA GOLDEN BEARS

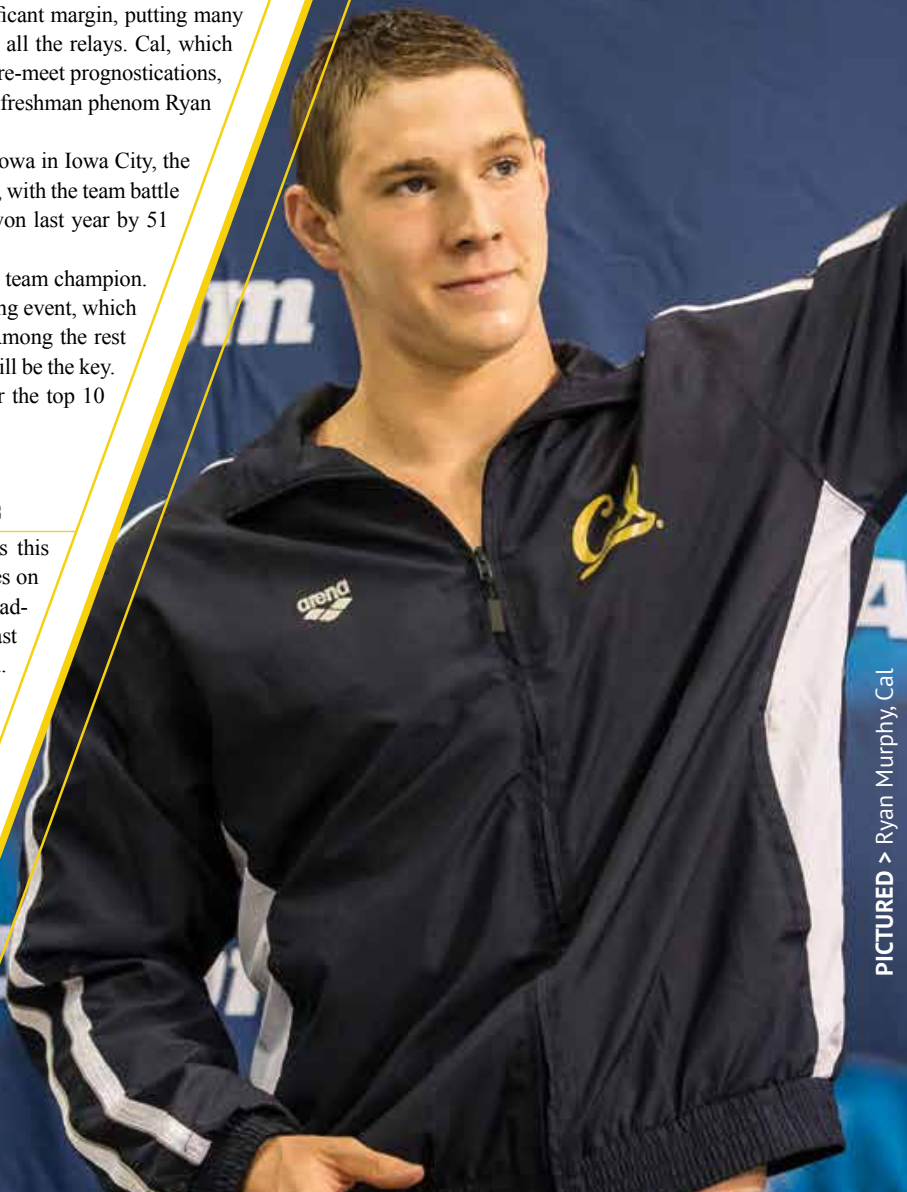
Last year: 1st [468.5 points] Returning points: 358



California gets the nod over Texas this year due to the return of all four athletes on Cal's 400 and 800 freestyle relays. In addition, three of the four members of last year's winning 200 and 400 medley relays also return. That should give Cal a lot of confidence, especially with the knowledge that freshman Justin Lynch is primed to slip into the vacant butterfly roles in the medley relays. Behind Ryan Murphy, the rest of the squad should perform well in individual events, and the addition of freshman Connor Green will make Cal's backstroke presence even stronger than it was already. If the Golden Bears can place three swimmers in the top eight of the 200 back (Murphy, Green and Jacob Pebley), it could be the death knell for the opposition.

Strengths: relays, backstroke, breaststroke

Weaknesses: diving, distance freestyle



PICTURED > Ryan Murphy, Cal

**2. TEXAS LONGHORNS**

Last year: 2nd [417.5 points]

Returning points: 336.5

If Michael Hixon hadn't transferred to Indiana this season, Texas would have the ammunition needed to unseat Cal as team champions. If Texas is to win, the team will look to freshman Joe Schooling to replace Hixon's 52 points from last March. Schooling should be in the running in both butterfly events, as well as whatever event he swims on Day 1. Stalwarts Jack Conger and Clay Youngquist will need to perform better than they did last March, while Coach Eddie Reese will need a miracle from his breast-strokers to counter Cal's strength there. On the upside, Texas has the chance to score big in the 100 fly and 100 free, but that's offset with a perceived hole in the medley relays. Schooling was called on to swim breast-stroke in the 200 medley relay for Bolles School in their record-breaking performances in 2012. He might need to do that again. In diving, Cory Bowersox and Will Chandler will need to step up to continue the Longhorns' diving tradition at NCAAs.

*Strengths: diving, butterfly**Weaknesses: breaststroke, distance freestyle*

SCHOOL		LAST YEAR'S FINISH	LAST YEAR'S POINTS	POINTS RETURNING	POINTS LOST	SCORERS RETURNING
1. CALIFORNIA	1		468.5	358.0	110.5	10
2. TEXAS	2		417.5	336.5	81.0	13
3. GEORGIA	5		259.0	213.5	45.5	8
4. FLORIDA	3		387.0	203.0	184.0	9
5. MICHIGAN	4		310.0	173.5	136.5	7
6. STANFORD	9		155.0	155.0	0	6
7. ARIZONA	7		198.5	142.0	56.5	5
8. AUBURN	6		230.0	100.0	130.0	6
9. INDIANA	10		141.0	100.5	40.5	3
10. ALABAMA	12		121.5	95.0	26.5	4

**3. GEORGIA BULLDOGS**

Last year: 5th [259 points] Returning points: 213.5

Georgia has the opportunity to hold a team trophy this month despite a major lack of power in relays. The Bulldogs will score a few points in relay action, but the bulk of the total will come in individual races of 200 and 400 yards. Do not be surprised if Georgia places at least five athletes in the top 16 in the 400 IM. Led by reigning champion Chase Kalisz, the Bulldogs could score close to 60 points in the 400 IM if freshmen Gunnar Bentz and the Litherland triplets—Kevin, Mick and Jay—perform well in their championship debuts. The 200 IM is another big scoring opportunity, as are the 200s of the strokes. The Litherlands made big strides last summer at nationals, placing in the top 16 in their events, and they could also score high in distance freestyle. Matis Koski could score in the 200, 500 and 1650 freestyles, and will also be a key leg in relays.

Strengths: IM, distance freestyle / Weaknesses: sprint free, relays**4. FLORIDA GATORS**

Last year: 3rd [387 points] Returning points: 203

Florida will have a very tough time dealing with the graduations of NCAA champion Marcin Cieslak as well as perennial scorers Sebastien Rousseau and Brad DeBorde. Freshman star Caeleb Dressel could get Florida to the top of the podium in the 50 and 100 freestyles. It might be best to put him in the 200 free on the second day, but Dressel is also a threat in the 100 fly. Dan Wallace will be a major challenge for Kalisz in the 400 IM...but could the Scotsman win the 500 free this year? Relays are still strong, though the 800 free is the only relay that Florida has a chance of winning. Dressel and Wallace will be joined by sophomore Mitch D'Arrigo, and Coach Gregg Troy could choose from Corey Main, Pawel Werner, Arthur Frayler and Carlos Omana for that fourth spot. *Strengths: freestyle, relays*

Weaknesses: breaststroke, butterfly, backstroke**5. MICHIGAN WOLVERINES**

Last year: 4th [310 points] Returning points: 173.5

Despite viewing this as a "rebuilding year," one could make a case that Michigan could be holding one of the four team trophies this month. But losing the last of the team's incredible stable





PICTURED > Kevin Cordes, Arizona

of distance freestylers last season hurts in the team points race. Michigan will have to rely on 200 fly champion Dylan Bosch, breaststroker Richard Funk and sprinter Miguel Ortiz for the bulk of the heavy lifting, but this season's freshman class could do some damage as well. Paul Powers could find himself in the top 16 in the sprint freestyles, while PJ Ransford might put together a solid 1650. Pete Brumm, Anders Nielsen and Justin Glanda will need to score higher in the freestyle events for Michigan to get a top-four finish. The major obstacle to that goal is the lack of relay depth. **Strengths:** freestyle / **Weaknesses:** backstroke, butterfly



6. STANFORD CARDINAL

Last year: 9th [155 points] Returning points: 155

Stanford has the best opportunity to move up the rankings, as the Cardinal loses none of its scorers from the 2014 meet. Senior David Nolan has the opportunity to win the 200 IM, but the reality of the backstrokes means that Nolan might have to settle for second in both distances. Stanford failed to score in two of the five relays a year ago, which was a big blow, but this year, the Cardinal has freshman Curtis Ogren to add some points in the 200 IM and possibly some top-eight points in the 400 IM and 200 breast. The big key for Stanford each year lies in diver Kristian Ipsen. He failed to win a diving event last year, and the 3-meter specialist could be more determined than ever to end his collegiate career with at least one more diving title. Bradley Christensen scored on the 1-meter last year, and will need to do the same or better to help Stanford improve on last year's performance. **Strengths:** diving, IM, backstroke / **Weaknesses:** sprint freestyle, breaststroke



7. ARIZONA WILDCATS

Last year: 7th [198.5 points] Returning points: 142

If Arizona can avoid the disqualification bug that bit them twice at last year's NAAs, the Wildcats can hold on to their placing from 2014. Kevin Cordes brings almost a guaranteed 40 points with his probable wins in the 100 and 200 breaststrokes, and Brad Tandy will be looking to claim sole ownership of the 50 free title this month after sharing it in 2014 with Alabama's Kristian Gkolomeev. Arizona will suffer a bit with the graduation of butterflyer Giles Smith and backstroker Mitchell Friedemann, but senior Brian Stevens (freestyle) has been swimming well as a butterflyer this season and is likely to step in and help Arizona place well in the medley relays.

Strengths: breaststroke, sprint freestyle, diving / **Weaknesses:** backstroke



8. AUBURN TIGERS

Last year: 6th [230 points] Returning points: 100

Losing key relay players such as Marcelo Chierighini and James Disney-May will severely hurt Auburn. It's not likely the Tigers will be able to defend their 400 free relay title, but the medley relays look strong with backstroker Joe Patching, breaststroker Jacob Molacek and freestyler Kyle Darmody. Auburn's point potential in individual events relies on Patching getting into the top 8 in a couple of events, Molacek scoring well in the breaststroke and Darmody getting into several finals.

Strengths: relays / **Weaknesses:** distance freestyle



9. INDIANA HOOSIERS

Last year: 10th [141 points] Returning points: 100.5

If not for the addition of Texas transfer Michael Hixon to the roster this season, the Hoosiers would be hard-pressed to place in the top 10—especially after losing such stalwarts as Cody Miller, Eric Ress and James Wells to graduation. Stephen Schmuhl looks to score high in the IMs and 200 fly, but freshman Blake Pieroni might emerge as the team's top scorer if he can find himself in the top 16 in the 50, 100 and 200 freestyles. Relays are the big question mark for the Hoosiers, though Pieroni and Anze Tavcar could help get Indiana some points in the sprint free relays. **Strengths:** diving, IM / **Weaknesses:** breaststroke



10. ALABAMA CRIMSON TIDE

Last year: 12th [121.5 points] Returning points: 95

Kristian Gkolomeev, the reigning co-champion in the 50 free, will have to score in more than the splash-and-dash to help the Crimson Tide jump into the top 10. He'll need to get into the championship final of the 100 free and contribute as well in an individual event on the second day. Anton McKee didn't perform up to expectations in 2014, but should place high in both breaststrokes this year. Brett Walsh could add more punch for Alabama if he can score in the sprint freestyles.

Strengths: sprint freestyle, breaststroke / **Weaknesses:** butterfly, backstroke, IM ❖



PICTURED > KChase Kalisz, Georgia

MEN'S NCAA DIVISION I CHAMPS: FRESHMEN TO WATCH

Commentary by Jeff Commings

Being a freshman at the Men's NCAA Division I championships is a scary situation. I was a nervous wreck in my first NCAA meet, and though I had been in meets with equal importance (USA Swimming nationals, Olympic Trials), this was a different experience. Adrenaline was high and tension was higher. Most freshmen can't handle the experience, but a few have. Ryan Murphy won both backstroke events last year as a freshman, and Kristian Gkolomeev was victorious in the 50 free as a freshman. Will we see another freshman at the top of the podium this year?

These freshmen stand on the brink of major performances in two weeks, and we present some background on them as they prepare for the most intense meet of their lives.

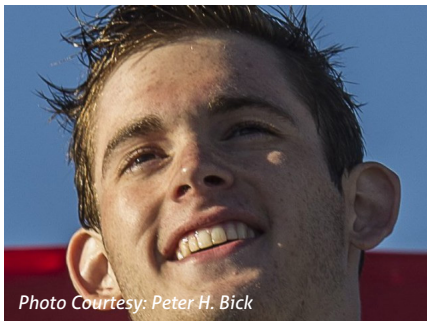


Photo Courtesy: Peter H. Bick

GUNNAR BENTZ - GEORGIA

Georgia has arguably the best freshman class in the nation, led by junior national team member Gunnar Bentz. Look for Bentz to make the top eight in the 400 IM, but can he get into the 200 IM championship final as well? That could be a tough thing to do, but Bentz is seeded 12th with a lifetime best 1:43.48. He'll need to be under 1:42 in prelims, which is not out of the realm of possibility. Bentz's strength in the IM is his breaststroke, and he tends to work the back half of the race – much like Georgia teammate Chase Kalisz. Bentz will need to be more aggressive in the front of his IM races to have a chance at placing high in either event.

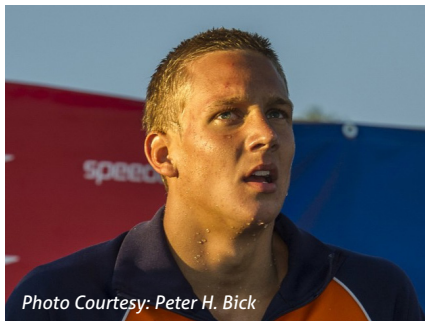


Photo Courtesy: Peter H. Bick

CAELEB DRESSEL - FLORIDA

Dressel is probably the only freshman with a strong chance of winning an individual NCAA title this year. He's seeded second in the 50 free and 100 free, events that could be decided by hundredths of a second. In both events, Gkolomeev is seeded ahead of him by a combined .47 seconds. It's tough to say which event Dressel has the bigger shot for the title, given that he's so good in both sprint events. Perhaps the door is open a bit wider in the 100 free, where Gkolomeev is still relatively new to the event, while Dressel has major experience in the race, including a junior world title. Dressel said he's felt rejuvenated at Florida after taking some time off to refocus.



Photo Courtesy: Andy Ringgold/Aringo

JOSEPH SCHOOLING - TEXAS

As the freshman with the most impressive swimming accomplishments, Schooling comes into the NCAA championships with very high expectations after winning medals at the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games. Before Jack Conger broke the American record in the 200 fly, Schooling was the only one I believed had the talent to take down reigning champion Dylan Bosch in the 200 fly. Now, Texas has a 1-2 punch against Michigan's Bosch, and it would not surprise me if Schooling unleashes something historic in two weeks. I fully expect Schooling under the 1:40 barrier, which will create an exciting three-way battle for the 200 fly title. We know Schooling has amazing talent in the 100 fly, thanks to his national high school record of 45.52. Schooling has already posted a 44.81 this season. Schooling is also a threat in the 200 IM, having four strong strokes, but probably not the speed to hold the pace of the top four.

3 WHO CAN BREAK 19 IN 50 FREE

Commentary by Jeff Commings

The championship final of the 50 free at the men's NCAA Division I championships in Iowa in two weeks could be historic. We could see the most swims under 19 seconds in the final than ever, but history has shown us that breaking that magical barrier at one of the most competitive meets in the world is much easier said than done.

Four men go into the meet with seed times under 19 seconds. Co-reigning NCAA champions Brad Tandy of Arizona and Kristian Gkolomeev of Alabama will be looking to swim faster than the 18.95 they both posted last year, and Gkolomeev has already done that with an 18.64 from the SEC championships. Tandy matched his NCAA time last week at the Pac 12 championships.

Also in the mix will be Florida freshman Caeleb Dressel, who

swam a lifetime best 18.89 three weeks ago. N.C. State junior Simonas Bilis cracked the 19-second barrier for the first time with an 18.98 at the ACC championships.

If those four are under 19 in the final, it will tie the record of four sub-19 swims in one final from the full-body techsuit 2009 championships. Six swimmers actually broke 19 at that meet, but two were swum in the consolation final. Last year, three swimmers broke 19 in the final, including now-graduated Brad DeBorde of Florida with his 18.98.

The following three swimmers also have the potential to go under 19 seconds later this month, and if it happens, it will be the fastest field of the 50 free in history.



Photo Courtesy: Peter H. Bick

SETH STUBBLEFIELD

Stubblefield has the best chance of breaking 19, having done it once before at last year's NCAA championships. But he did it in prelims with an 18.97. The California senior, seeded 11th with a 19.32, will need to go under 19 again in prelims just to secure a place in the final, but the key to giving California the big points is to find the confidence to do it one more time in the final. Like most who swim in the top 16 in the 50 free at NAAs, Stubblefield will have swum the 50 free three times earlier in the day, including prelims and finals of the 200 free relay. That can be taxing for any swimmer, but Stubblefield will be one who has the potential to stand up to the task.



Photo Courtesy: Michigan Athletics

PAUL POWERS

Powers, a freshman at Michigan, could join Dressel in the final and give the field of eight a jolt of young blood. Powers dropped three tenths off his lifetime best to earn the seventh seed in the 50 free with a 19.21. If he can find another three tenths, he's under 19 and part of history. Powers spent last summer working with the elite squad at SwimMAC Carolina alongside Cullen Jones, so he has the skills needed to break the barrier. But will the pressure of the NAAs be too overwhelming?



Photo Courtesy: Kenneth J. Martin

DAVID WILLIAMS

N.C. State has a strong and proud tradition of sprint freestyle that dates back to Cullen Jones, and David Williams has been a vital part of that. Williams is seeded fifth with a 19.12, which is oh-so-close to the magic barrier. In order to join Bilis in the final, he'll have to go under 19 seconds, and he will likely be riding the wave of adrenaline from the 200 free relay earlier in the session. N.C. State will be a strong challenger there, and if Williams can keep his energy level up through four 50 freestyle races, we could see two N.C. State swimmers under 19 seconds, something no other school is likely to boast this year.

MEN'S NCAA DIVISION I CHAMPS:

3 SERIOUS TITLE CONTENDERS IN DISTANCE FREESTYLE

Commentary by Jeff Commings

Being a freshman at the Men's NCAA Division I championships is a scary situation. I was a nervous wreck in my first NCAA meet, and though I had been in meets with equal importance (USA Swimming nationals, Olympic Trials), this was a different experience. Adrenaline was high and tension was higher. Most freshmen can't handle the experience, but a few have. Ryan Murphy won both backstroke events last year as a freshman, and Kristian Gkolomeev was victorious in the 50 free as a freshman. Will we see another freshman at the top of the podium this year?

These freshmen stand on the brink of major performances in two weeks, and we present some background on them as they prepare for the most intense meet of their lives.



Photo Courtesy: David Farr

ANDREA "MITCH" D'ARRIGO

The Florida sophomore was a part of the championship final of the 200 and 500 freestyles last year as a freshman, and was in the top eight in the mile. In regards to the 500 free, he's the most serious threat to Southern California's Cristian Quintero defending his title. D'Arrigo swam a 4:10.77 at the SEC championships, and will have to be just a bit faster if he wants to dethrone Quintero. I predict a swim under 4:10 for the winner. The 1650 free is becoming a stronger event for D'Arrigo and should he have the confidence to maintain the early pace of some of the more established milers in the field, he could find an extra gear in the end.



Photo Courtesy: SwimmingWorld.TV

ANTON IPSEN

N.C. State could be one of the few schools to place a swimmer in the top eight of all the freestyle events at the NCAA championships in two weeks. Ipsen will carry the burden alone for the Wolfpack in the 500 and 1650, but the freshman has been performing admirably all season and should have the confidence to become one of the few freshmen to win a distance freestyle title at the NCAAs. Ipsen is seeded seventh in both events, but the Dane is growing accustomed to short course yards racing with each meet, and that could help him in the final stretches of each race.



Photo Courtesy: Peter H. Bick

MATIAS KOSKI

Koski was third in the 500 free and fourth in the 1650 free as a freshman in 2013, and slipped a bit in 2014. But he's been swimming stronger this year, and his experience over the rest of the field could be a major bonus for him. Like Quintero, Koski is great in distance and sprint freestyle, and that will help him in both events. With the 500 free starting to become a "long sprint," Koski should be able to switch into whichever energy system he needs to push the pace and be in the hunt at the end of the race. I see him being the rabbit in the 1650 free, taking a strong lead and doing his best to hold off the negative splitters in the race.

MEN'S NCAA DIVISION I CHAMPIONSHIPS: 4 WITH CHANCE TO MAKE BACKSTROKE TOP 8

Commentary by Jeff Commings

Ryan Murphy will be going for the unprecedented double in the backstroke events in two weeks at the men's NCAA Division I championships, and the sophomore will likely view everyone in the final of the 100 and 200 backstrokes as a worthy competitor, and a likely challenger to his crown.

Here's a look at four who have an outside chance to make the top eight in one or both backstroke events.



GRIGORY TARASEVICH

Though he's ranked 15th in the 100 back and 12th in the 200 back, I'm picking Tarasevich as strong possibility to get into the top eight. His best opportunity lies in the 200 back, and he'll be looking for redemption after placing 18th in last year's championships. The Louisville sophomore has made some big strides this season, and if he can get under 1:40 in prelims, he will be in the top eight. The 100 backstroke remains too much of a sprint for the tall and wiry Russian, but a great race in prelims could get him in the top eight there as well.



PATRICK CONATON

Conaton qualified for the NCAA championship in the 200 back with a 1:40.48 in a time trial at the Pac 12 championships. The fact that he got under 1:41 again in the 200 back prelims at that meet shows his time trial wasn't a fluke. But the Stanford freshman will need to be a bit faster to get into the top eight, and will likely do it.



JOE PATCHING

Patching has been a strong but deadly performer for Auburn this season, and has been a great leader in and out of the pool. Many expected him to make the championship final of the 200 back last year at the NCAA championships, but he was only able to finish 11th overall. The sting of not making the A final last year has likely been the driving force for Patching all season, and that could translate to a spot in the championship final. Patching is seeded seventh in a very tight field of 11 swimmers in the 1:40 range. As I mentioned with Conaton, a 1:39 or better is what it will take to get into the final. Patching has strong underwater kicks and should use those to his advantage near the end of the race when others are going into oxygen debt.



NATE SAVOY

Last year, Shane Ryan nearly won the 100 backstroke while Penn State teammate Nate Savoy was 10th in the consolation final. What a coup for the Nittany Lions if they can get two swimmers in the 100 back final, and send a message that Tim Murphy is continuing to move the program forward in his second season in University Park. Savoy is seeded 13th in the 100 back with a 46.02, just outside a bunch of swimmers in the 45 range. The senior swam a lifetime best 45.61 at last year's Big Ten meet, and will need to be a few ticks faster than that to assure himself a place in the final alongside his teammate.

MEN'S NCAA DIVISION I CHAMPIONSHIPS: 3 WHO CAN BREAK 1:50 IN 200 BREAST

Commentary by Jeff Commings

Kevin Cordes is bound to have some company in the rarefied air that is the sub-1:50 club in the 200 breast in two weeks at the men's NCAA Division I Championships. While no one has even been under 1:51 except for Cordes, this year could mark a major turning point in the 200 breast, and a major step forward for American swimming.

Cordes has given a major boost of confidence to his competition this year, as the Arizona senior has not put up his usual jaw-dropping times this season. Is he holding back and waiting for something amazing in his final college meet, or are we seeing a dent in the armor? In any case, his challengers have been working hard to break that 1:50 barrier since Cordes first broke it in 2013. Three swimmers have a legitimate shot at that barrier, based on their performances so far this season.



Photo Courtesy: Griffin Scott

NIC FINK

Fink made a major breakthrough in 2013, qualifying for the world championship team in the 100 breast. His 200 breast improved greatly in 2014, resulting in a third-place time of 1:51.92 at last year's NAAs. Fink is the top seed in the event with a 1:51.58, and his speed could be an asset in the 200. He should easily be able to hit the 100-yard mark in 52-mid, but he'll need two more 50s under 29 seconds to break the barrier. If he can split 52-low at the 100, he'll give Cordes a serious run in the final half of the race.



Photo Courtesy: Griffin Scott

CHUCK KATIS

Like Cordes, this is Katis' final NCAA championships, and he'll want to go out with a bang. Katis has the tools to keep pace with Cordes in the opening 100, but the test will be posting splits under 29 seconds for the third and fourth 50s. Katis is seeded 16th in the 200 breast with a 1:54.30, but his best time is 1:52.64 from last year's NAAs. Yes, dropping 2.6 seconds at this level is quite difficult and rare, but I believe he's been holding back on a breakout swim, waiting for the 200 breast final in Iowa City to get the Golden Bears cheering.

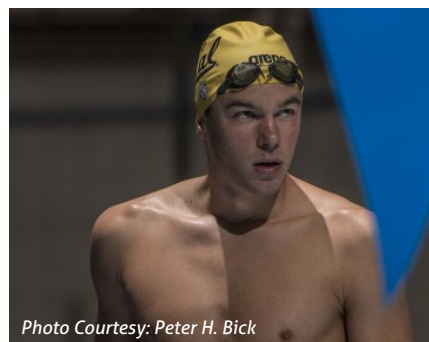


Photo Courtesy: Peter H. Bick

JOSH PRENOT

Prenot could also get under the 1:50 barrier thanks to a season's worth of work with Katis. Prenot has been gaining attention mostly for his IM prowess, but he is a solid 200 breast-stroker, proven last summer with a fourth-place finish in the 200 breast at the Pan Pacific championships. Prenot is a silent but deadly swimmer, and appears to have an constant source of energy in the pool. If he can tap into some early speed, he'll have the endurance at the end. The major issue for Prenot will be recovering well from swimming two 400 IMs the previous day.

MEN'S NCAA DIVISION I CHAMPIONSHIPS: 3 CHALLENGERS FOR IM AMERICAN RECORD HOLDERS

Commentary by Jeff Commings

On paper, it would seem that David Nolan has secured the 200 IM title at the men's NCAA Division I championships, and Chase Kalisz is the solid leader for the 400 IM win. But the NCAA meet is all about surprises, and nothing is certain until the race is over.

Last year, Kalisz had no challengers on his way to breaking the American and NCAA record in the 400 IM, but his challengers in 2015 have had a year to visualize beating him (though Kalisz also has had a year to get better). As for Nolan, it would seem illogical to think that anyone in the current lineup has a chance at coming close to posting a 1:40-low or 1:39 in the 200 IM, but the emotions behind a championship race often produce the unthinkable.

Below, we present two challengers to Kalisz's throne in the 400 IM, and the one person who seems to have the best chance to take down Nolan in the 200 IM in two weeks in Iowa.

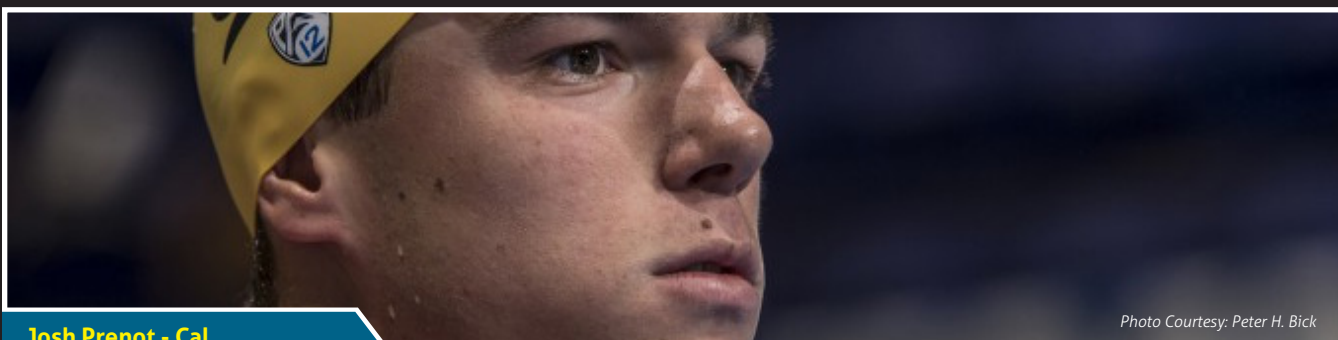


Photo Courtesy: Peter H. Bick

Josh Prenot - Cal

The California junior has been performing well in the 400 IM this season, putting up four solid 400 IMs in two dual meets and two championship meets. Prenot was 3:38.58 in last year's 400 IM final, and has been improving his weak strokes this season with the aim of staying within striking distance of Kalisz. Prenot specializes in breaststroke, and the two could put together some epic sub-1:00 splits there to separate themselves from the field. We will see how Prenot's freestyle matches up to Kalisz's, but if Prenot wants to be in the hunt, he'll have to have an aggressive first 200 yards without expending too much energy.



Photo Courtesy: David Farr

Dan Wallace- Florida

Wallace gained a bit of celebrity in his native Scotland when he won the Commonwealth Games title in the 400 IM last summer. The thrill of winning for your country – and ranking eighth in the world for 2014 – was likely a major motivator for Wallace in his senior season at Florida. Wallace has been in the hunt for this 400 IM title for three years, and wants to end his collegiate career with an upset of major proportions. Like Prenot, Wallace will need to have an aggressive opening 200 yards, playing to his strengths. Wallace has the potential to outsplit Kalisz on freestyle, so Wallace will need to swim tough on breaststroke and not let Kalisz overtake him by much.



Photo Courtesy: Peter H. Bick

Chase Kalisz - Georgia

If Kalisz can beat David Nolan in the 200 IM, the race for the 400 IM will be a one-man show. The confidence that Kalisz could take from trumping the American record holder will be enormous, and Kalisz will have to swim the race of his life in order to get into the 1:40-low range. Kalisz's downfall for years has been his backstroke, and if that has improved this year, he has a sliver of hope. Kalisz is likely to only outsplit Nolan on breaststroke, but if the two are tied going into freestyle, the race will be a toss-up. Kalisz's endurance will help him in the closing stages of the race. He will need to tap into his inner sprinter and challenge for the lead in the opening 100.

MEN'S NCAA DIVISION I CHAMPIONSHIPS: PICKING RELAY WINNERS

Commentary by Jeff Commings

Any team that has a serious shot at winning the team title at the men's NCAA Division I Championships in two weeks in Iowa City must win at least one relay. It's not a requirement, but it definitely helps. Relays score double points in the NAACAs, which explains why the team that wins the most relays often wins the meet.

The California Golden Bears won three of the five relays in 2014 on their way to the team title, and the team looks like they will win only two of those later this month. How it will affect their defense of the team title will depend on their placings in all five relays – as well as the 13 individual events – and how their rivals perform. Here are my predictions for the five relays:



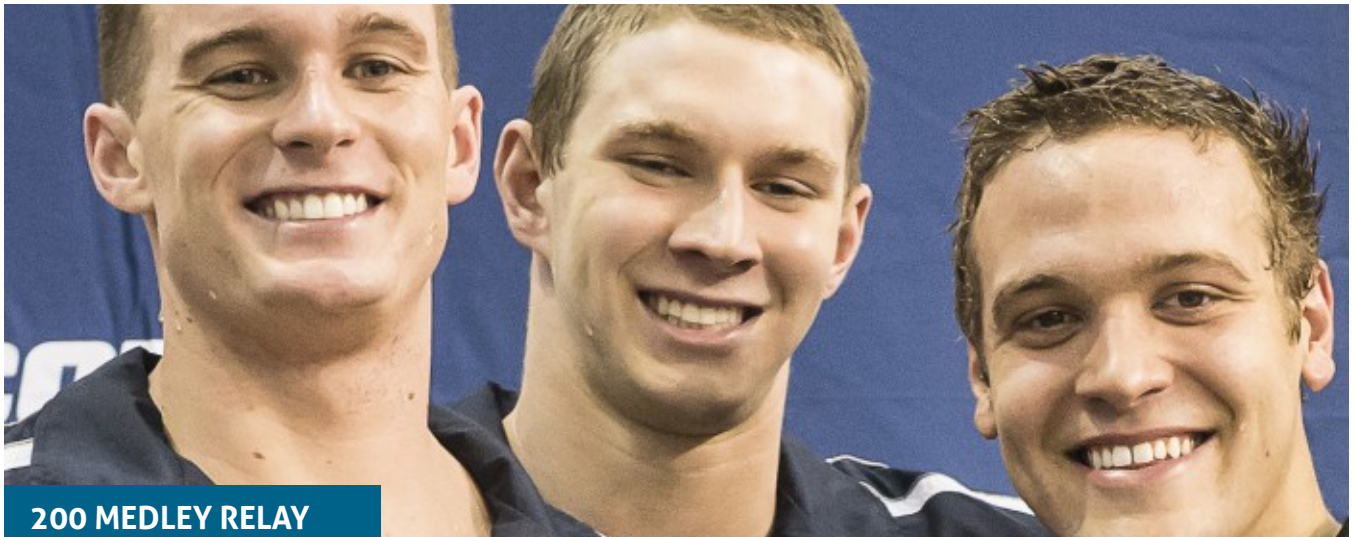
200 FREESTYLE RELAY

N.C. State was primed to place third in last year's meet largely on the strength of their relays. But a disqualification in the 200 freestyle relay hurt morale, and the Wolfpack finished 13th. If N.C. State can stay legal in the first race of the meet, they have a very strong shot at winning. With three swimmers seeded in the top 10 of the 50 free, N.C. State has the best lineup of any school. Last year, three schools posted 1:15s, and we could see N.C. State, California and Texas in the mix. Give N.C. State the advantage right based on seeds, but the key is not to get overly excited and jump the gun.



400 MEDLEY RELAY

There's no way California can lose this. With a fully tapered Ryan Murphy and Chuck Katis, the Golden Bears will have built a sizeable lead after the breaststroke. Seth Stubblefield is the likely butterflyer, giving Tyler Messerschmidt freestyle duties. Texas might be able to make up some ground on butterfly, but without a breastroker on par with Katis, the Longhorns have a major deficit. Southern California also needs a breastroker to match Katis, but are just as solid in the three other strokes.



200 MEDLEY RELAY

The field is a little tighter in the short medley, but the edge remains with California. Why bet against the American record holders? Michigan and Texas both will be tough, but the main challenger will be Southern California, thanks to major improvements for sprinter Santo Condorelli in his senior year. Southern California was 14th in this event last year, but has been making some serious improvements in the stroke events in the past year.

800 FREESTYLE RELAY

For the same reason that N.C. State is favored in the 200 free relay, you can't count against the Southern California Trojans in the 800 free relay. USC has three swimmers seeded in the top 15 in the 200 free, and only Florida comes close to matching that. Florida will bring in Dan Wallace for the relay, and likely Caeleb Dressel, which should make it as close as it was last year, when USC held off Florida to win. Michigan surprised with the top seed in a 6:12.20, and even without Michael Wrynald and Connor Jaeger to lean on this year, swam fast at the Big Ten meet. The major issue with the 800 free relay at the NCAA meet is that it comes at the end of the second day. Most will have already swum the 200 free twice, or in some cases, the 400 IM. Conference meets these days are putting the 800 free relay at the beginning of the meet when athletes are fresher. We might not see much faster swims than the seed times, but the main goal is winning the race.



400 FREESTYLE RELAY

N.C. State made a bid for the title in this event last year, leading after the third leg. Auburn's Kyle Darmody put up a monster anchor leg to not only beat N.C. State but California as well. Those three teams will battle again this year, and I'm throwing in Southern California as a wild card. The NCAA and U.S. Open record of 2:46.03 is not in jeopardy, but keep an eye on that American record of 2:47.02. California is the only top school eligible for that, and a close race could get the Bears close to a record. I'm picking N.C. State for the win, and it will happen if the last three swimmers can all average 42.0 or better. Auburn, California and USC will have trouble with that, while the Wolfpack has three swimmers who can easily go that fast. Getting the fourth swimmer to match that split will be the only way to win.