

2002 Swimmers of the Year

Swimmers were able to compete in a plethora of meets in 2002: Commonwealth Games, European Championships, Pan Pacific Championships, Asian Games and Short Course World Championships, not to mention each swimmer's respective national championships. Following are those swimmers who the staff of *Swimming World* and its international correspondents voted the best of the best.

By Judy Jacob

World Swimmers of the Year

A year ago, Australia's Ian Thorpe was superhuman, setting five world records on his way to earning his second straight male World Swimmer of the Year honors from *Swimming World*. By comparison, in 2002, Ian was but a mere mortal—only one world record and two No. 1 world rankings.

Still, *Swimming World's* panel of distinguished swimming experts felt Thorpe was deserving of his third straight title and fifth in the last six years.

Among the women, it was the United States' Natalie Coughlin who turned in superhuman efforts to become the nearly unanimous pick as *Swimming World's* female World Swimmer of the Year. Natalie, winning the award for the first time, set the first long course world record of her career as well as three national marks.

Thorpe's world record came in the 400 meter free, where he lowered his 3:40.17 set the previous year at the World Championships to 3:40.08 at the

Commonwealth Games in July. Earlier in the year at the Commonwealth Games Trials, Thorpe clocked a 3:40.54. With his two stellar swims this year, he now owns the top eight performances in the event.

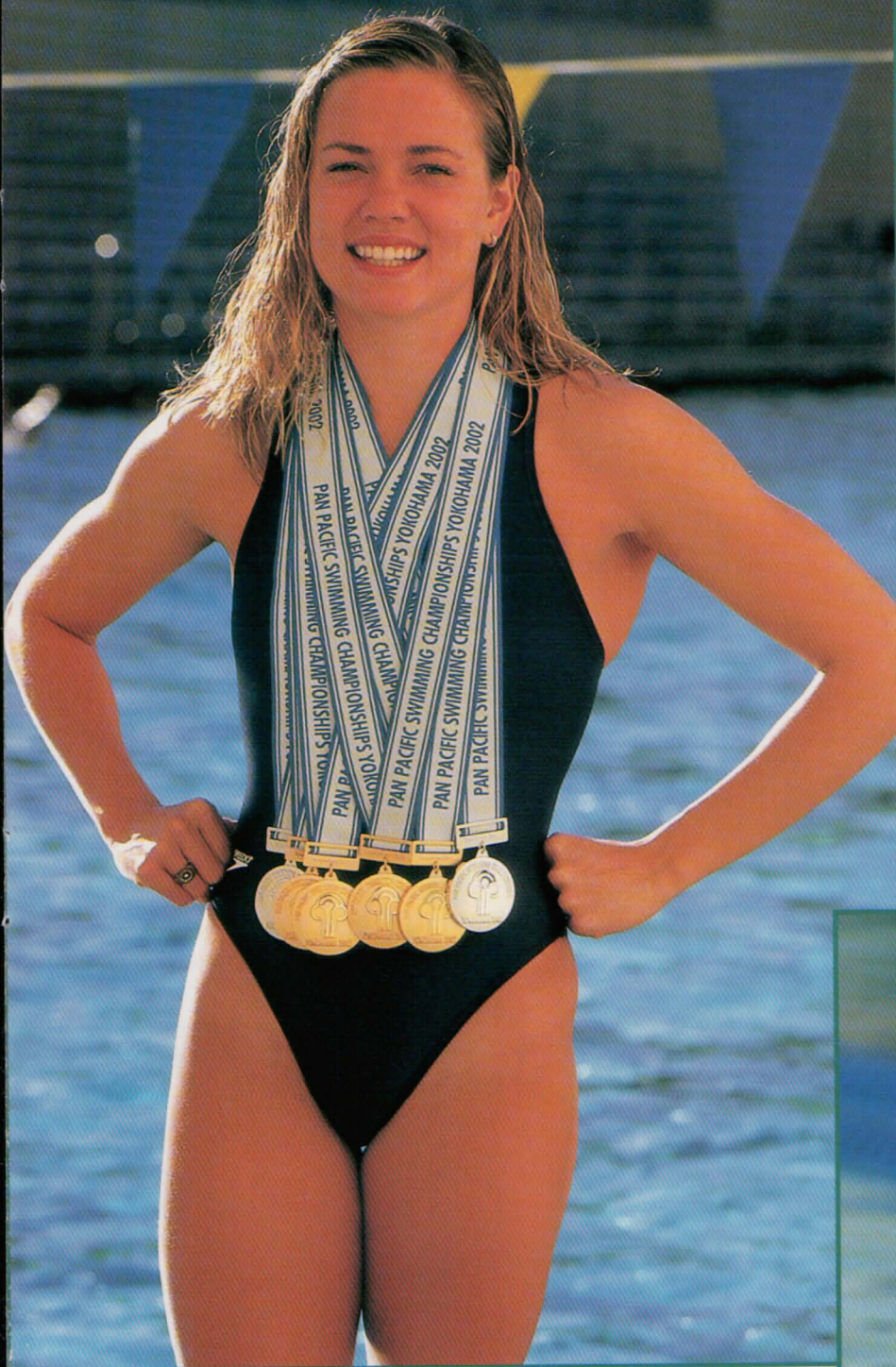
He also notched the third, fourth and seventh fastest times ever in the 200 meter free this year, including a 1:44.71 to win Commonwealth gold. In fact, Thorpe won enough gold this year to rival that of Rumpelstiltskin. Not only did he win the 200 and 400 freestyles at the Commonwealth Games and Pan



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ing Betsy Mitchell's 1986 mark of 2:08.60 from the books. And Natalie's 1:58.20 in the 200 free was the fourth fastest time swum this year.

She continued her winning ways in the 100 back at Pan Pacs with the second and third fastest times ever in the event—59.72 in finishing first and 1:00.09 in the relay. Coughlin set another national record in the 100 free with her 53.99, which bettered Jenny Thompson's 2000 time of 54.07 set at the Olympic Trials. Natalie also won the 100 fly in 57.88 to become the fifth performer all-time and second in 2002.

In 2002, Coughlin earned three No. 1 world rankings plus a No. 2 and a No. 4, and came home from Pan Pacs with four gold medals—100 free, 100 back, 100 fly and 800 free relay.

Photo by Tomy Duffy

Pacs, but he also added the 100 free at both meets. His 48.73 at the Commonwealth Games ranked third in the world this year and made him the eighth performer all-time.

Between the two meets, Thorpe won 11 gold medals—six individual events and five relays. At Pan Pacs, he contributed a speedy 47.20 freestyle split to anchor Australia's Commonwealth record-setting 3:34.84 in the 400 medley relay.

Coughlin set her world mark at the U.S. long course nationals in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. She became the first female to swim under a minute in the 100 meter back, clocking a 59.58 and wiping out He Cihong's 1994 mark of 1:00.16.

Natalie also set a national record in the 200 back of 2:08.53, eras-



Photo by Peter H. Bick