

Y'all Ready for This?

The Olympic Games are finally upon us! August 14-21. In Athens, Greece—birthplace of the modern Olympic movement. Four years in the making. Eight days of drama unlike any other. Here's a glimpse of what you can expect.

By Phillip Whitten

USA Swimming came out of the Olympic Trials in Long Beach on a major league high. And no wonder:

- U.S. swimmers set six world and seven American records.
- Even more impressive, they did it in a pool universally acknowledged to be slow.
- The temporary pool, with excellent seating for about 10,000 spectators, was an overwhelming success—more than 100,000 tickets were sold for the meet's 15 sessions.

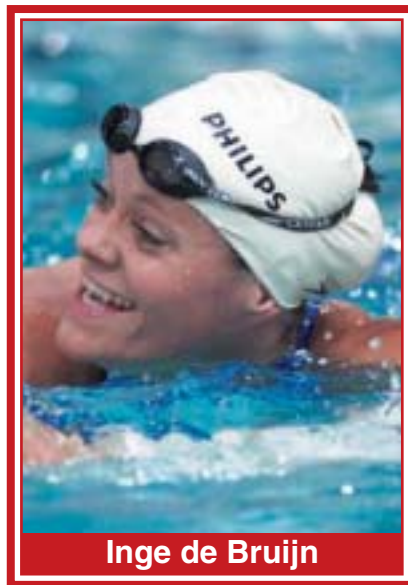
• Michael Phelps' quest to equal or surpass Mark Spitz' seven Olympic gold medals from the 1972 Munich Games was generating heavy, mainstream media coverage, some of which was spilling over to other top American swimmers and to our sport in general.

Yet, the picture is not all rosy.

Yes, the 43-member U.S. swim team—21 men and 22 women—is expected to dominate in Athens. But the makeup of the men's and women's team—and their prospects—could not be more different.

For starters, 17 of the 21 men—nearly 81 percent—are professional athletes, a radical change from past U.S. teams. Only 12 of the women—54.5 percent—are pros.

In terms of experience at the Olympic level, the differences are even more striking: 11 of the men, but only five of the women, have swum on previous U.S. Olympic teams.



Inge de Bruijn

Photo by Jonathan Wood, Getty Images

The major contrast between the two teams, however, lies in their prospects.

The U.S. men should be favored to win gold in fully nine of the 13 individual events and probably two of the three relays: the 50 free, 100 and 200 back, 100 and 200 breast, 100 and 200 fly, 200 and 400 IM, and both the 400 medley and free relays. In the remaining events—the 100, 200, 400 and 1500 meter freestyle and 800 meter free relay—the American men are likely to contend for silver and bronze medals.

The U.S. women, by contrast, are only favored in the 100 back and, perhaps, the 200 breast and 400 medley relay. Unlike the men, the American

women will be hard-pressed to earn a medal of any kind in as many as seven events: the 50 through 400 free, 200 back and both butterfly events.

In the past, however, U.S. teams have gone into the Olympics with only modest prospects and emerged covered with glory. It remains to be seen whether this team, endowed with enormous potential, can rise to the occasion.

The remainder of this article consists of our predictions for gold, silver and bronze in each race, as well as a list of potential medal challengers. Many of the races are extremely difficult to handicap, particularly the men's 50 and 100 free, all the women's freestyle events plus the 200 back and 200 IM.

Part of the reason is that there are a lot of unknowns, among them:

- What kind of team will the Chinese bring to Athens four years before Beijing?
- Will the British bounce back from their disastrous performance in Sydney (no medals)?
- Will the young Aussie women's team swim to its potential?
- Will the media attention affect Michael Phelps—particularly if he fails to live up to the eight-gold hype?

Despite the bumps and hazards, we have ventured hesitatingly, and with due humility, on this road, where much wiser souls have feared to tread. Here, then, are our predictions:

WOMEN

50 METER FREESTYLE

We haven't heard much from Inge De Bruijn lately, but she's been training under the watchful eye of Paul Bergen, and you can bet she'll be ready to rumble when the whistle blows and the world's eight fastest women mount the starting blocks. Just over 24 seconds later, Inky should get her hand on the wall first. Aussies Libby Lenton and Michelle Englesman, hoping to upset the "Flying Dutchwoman," should take second and third, though they face some formidable challengers. Britain's Allison Sheppard, 33, competing in her fifth Olympics, is looking to regain her form of the last two years; Holland's Marleen Veldhuis has joined the sub-25-second club; Sweden's Therese Alshammar, the short course WR-holder, is training hard; and France's Malia Metella is

improving quickly. The U.S. duo of Jenny Thompson and Kara Lynn Joyce will be hard-pressed to medal.

- Gold:** Inge de Bruijn (NED)
- Silver:** Libby Lenton (AUS)
- Bronze:** Michelle Englesman (AUS)

The Challengers: Marleen Veldhuis (NED); Therese Alshammar (SWE); Malia Metella (FRA); Jenny Thompson and Kara Lynn Joyce (USA), Allison Sheppard (GBR).

100 METER FREESTYLE

How fast is the 100 free this year? Consider this: last year, 18-year-old Finn, Hanna-Maria Seppala, won the World Championships and ranked No. 1 globally with a 54.37. The major meet of 2004 has not even taken place



Franziska van Almsick

Photo by Alexandra Winkler, Reuters

yet and already *eight* women have swum faster. Seppala only ranks 24th with a 55.36. The 100 free in Athens should easily be the fastest in history, with as many as four women under 54 seconds. Any one of those women could win it, but we think Jodie Henry's combination of youth plus poise gives her the edge. The two Americans, Natalie Coughlin and Kara Lynn Joyce, could surprise.

- Gold:** Jodie Henry (AUS)
- Silver:** Inge De Bruijn (NED)
- Bronze:** Libby Lenton (AUS)

The Challengers: Natalie Coughlin and Kara Lynn Joyce (USA), Federica Pellegrini (ITA), Malia Metella (FRA), Melanie Marshall (GBR).

200 METER FREESTYLE

One month before the Games are set to begin, fully 25 women have swum the 200 free under two minutes, but none has established herself as the favorite. As we went to press, there were a lot more questions than answers: Will Germany's Franzi van Almsick finally win that elusive gold in her final Olympic appearance? Can Claudia Poll, the 1996 Olympic champion, come back after a two-year suspension? Is Poland's Otylia Jędrzejczak, the 200 fly WR-holder, for real? The USA's Lindsay Benko, last year's world leader with an American record 1:57.41, was almost two seconds slower at Trials. Will she be her

Schedule of Olympic Finals		
Day	WOMEN	MEN
Day 1: Aug. 14	400 IM (P Aug. 14) 4x100 FR (P Aug. 14)	400 IM (P Aug. 14) 400 Free (P Aug. 14)
Day 2: Aug. 15	100 Fly (P, SF Aug. 14) 400 Free (P Aug. 15)	100 Breast (P, SF Aug. 14) 4x100 FR (P Aug. 15)
Day 3: Aug. 16	100 Back (P, SF Aug. 15) 100 Breast (P, SF Aug. 15)	200 Free (P, SF Aug. 15) 100 Back (P, SF Aug. 15)
Day 4: Aug. 17	200 Free (P, SF Aug. 16) 200 IM (P, SF Aug. 16)	200 Fly (P, SF Aug. 16) 4x200 FR (P Aug. 17)
Day 5: Aug. 18	200 Fly (P, SF Aug. 17) 4x200 FR (P Aug. 18)	200 Breast (P, SF Aug. 17) 100 Free (P, SF Aug. 17)
Day 6: Aug. 19	200 Breast (P, SF Aug. 18) 100 Free (P, SF Aug. 18)	200 Back (P, SF Aug. 18) 200 IM (P, SF Aug. 18)
Day 7: Aug. 20	200 Back (P, SF Aug. 19) 800 Free (P Aug. 19)	100 Fly (P, SF Aug. 19) 50 Free (P, SF Aug. 19)
Day 8: Aug. 21	50 Free (P, SF Aug. 20) 4x100 MR (P Aug. 20)	1500 Free (P Aug. 20) 4x100 MR (P Aug. 20)

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Leisel Jones

Photo by Jeff Crow, Sport•The Library

Yamada. Still, this will be a tightly-fought battle with at least half a dozen swimmers having a legitimate shot at the gold, or at least a medal of some color.

Gold: Sachiko Yamada (JPN)
Silver: Diana Munz (USA)
Bronze: Kalyn Keller (USA)

The Challengers: Flavia Rigamonti (SUI), Ai Shibata (JPN), Laure Manaudou (FRA), Camelia Potec (ROM), Rebecca Cooke (GBR), Hannah Stockbauer (GER).

100 METER BACKSTROKE

World record holder Natalie Coughlin has swum the 100 backstroke under a minute on three separate occasions. No other woman has ever broken the one-minute barrier even once. So Coughlin is heavily favored to win this event in Athens. She should do it, but it won't be a cakewalk. Since she lowered the WR to its present 59.58 in 2002, the rest of the world's top dorsal specialists have cut into Natalie's lead. One or more of them could decide that the Athens Games would be just the place to bust a move. Japan, France and Britain all have contenders, while China's two young backstrokers make their major international debut here.

Gold: Natalie Coughlin (USA)
Silver: Laure Manaudou (FRA)
Bronze: Antje Buschschulte (GER)

The Challengers: Reiko Nakamura (JPN), Katy Sexton and Sarah Price (GBR), Haley Cope (USA), Gao Chang and Chen Xiujun (CHN).

200 METER BACKSTROKE

Here is still another race that is totally up for grabs. Russia's Stanislava Komarova should have the inside track, but she has been less than consistent. The two Japanese and British dorsal swimmers, on the other hand, have been more consistent but have less basic speed. The USA's Margaret Hoelzer and Kristen Caverly are longshots, but could figure in the medals.

Gold: Stanislava Komarova (RUS)
Silver: Reiko Nakamura (JPN)
Bronze: Katy Sexton (GBR)

The Challengers: Aya Terakawa (JPN), Karen Lee (GBR), Margaret Hoelzer and Kristen Caverly (USA).

100 METER BREASTSTROKE

There are five women capable of taking all the marbles in what should be one of the most exciting races at the Games. The winner will almost certainly have to take down the world record of 1:06.37 by Australia's Leisel Jones. Jones, herself, is the favorite, though she has a habit of swimming her best times in prelims or semis. Her teammate, Brooke Hanson, is hungry, finally making the Aussie team after just missing in 1996 and 2000. The U.S. boasts Tara Kirk, the short course WR-holder, and Amanda Beard, who has been remarkably consistent and consistently fast for the past two years. The biggest question mark is China's Luo Xuejuan, who has not competed outside of China this year. Look for the winner to go 1:05 and for two superb swimmers to be left without a medal.

old self by Athens? And that's just for starters. It's truly a toss-up, but we think the race may wind up like this:

Gold: Melanie Marshall (GBR)
Silver: Franziska van Almsick (GER)
Bronze: Otylia Jędrzejczak (POL)

The Challengers: Claudia Poll (CRC), Lindsay Benko (USA).

400 METER FREESTYLE

Five swimmers have already swum 4:07s this year, so the USA's Kaitlin Sandeno and Kalyn Keller will have to hustle to win a medal. This is another event in which any of a dozen swimmers could wind up with the gold.

Gold: Hannah Stockbauer (GER)
Silver: Sachiko Yamada (JPN)
Bronze: Eva Risztov (HUN)

The Challengers: Camelia Potec (ROM), Otylia Jędrzejczak (POL), Ai Shibata (JPN), Laure Manaudou (FRA), Joanne Jackson (GBR), Linda MacKenzie (AUS), Kaitlin Sandeno and Kalyn Keller (USA).

800 METER FREESTYLE

With double defending Olympic champion Brooke Bennett third at the U.S. Trials and a non-qualifier for Athens, the 800 lost some of its allure. The race should go to Japan's Sachiko



Sachiko Yamada



Petria Thomas

Photo by Nick Wilson, Allsport

Gold: Leisel Jones (AUS)
Silver: Tara Kirk (USA)
Bronze: Luo Xuejuan (CHN)

The Challengers: Amanda Beard (USA), Brooke Hanson (AUS).

200 METER BREASTSTROKE

That Jones girl, who in July broke the WR Amanda Beard shared with China's Qi Hui, and Amanda, who recaptured her record three days later at the U.S. Trials, go *mano-a-mano* over 200 meters in what promises to be yet another thrilling race. Unlike the 100, this probably will be a two-woman show, though China's Qi Hui could join the mix. Several others may challenge Qi for the bronze.

Gold: Amanda Beard (USA)
Silver: Leisel Jones (AUS)
Bronze: Qi Hui (CHN)

The Challengers: Brooke Hanson (AUS), Birte Steven (GER), Mirna Jukic (AUT).

100 METER BUTTERFLY

Coming into the Games, Australia's Petria Thomas, with her 57.36, is the only swimmer to have gone under 58 seconds this year for the 100 meter fly. But there are 10 would-be gold medalists waiting in the wings, all of whom have swum 58-something. Among them is WR-holder Inky De

Bruijn. The U.S. pair of Rachel Komisarz and Jenny Thompson ranks seventh and 10th. Rachel swam a PR in winning Trials in 58.77, but Jenny—who was world champion last year—can improve substantially on her 58.91. Watch out, too, for Libby Lenton, who has added the fly to her sprint freestyle program.

Gold: Inge De Bruijn (NED)
Silver: Petria Thomas (AUS)
Bronze: Martina Moravcova (SVK)

The Challengers: Otylia Jedrzejczak (POL), Libby Lenton (AUS), Jenny Thompson and Rachel Komisarz (USA), Junko Onishi (JPN), Malia Metella (FRA), Anna-Karin Kammerling (SWE), Alena Popchanka (BLR).

200 METER BUTTERFLY

Poland's Otylia Jedrzejczak is the WR-holder and has been having a fabulous year, but we have a hunch that Thomas is going to break through to uncharted territory at 2:04 to win this one. These two women will take the top two spots, leaving half a dozen swimmers to battle for the bronze, among them the USA's Dana Kirk.

Gold: Petria Thomas (AUS)
Silver: Otylia Jedrzejczak (POL)
Bronze: Yuko Nakanishi (JPN)

The Challengers: Dana Kirk (USA), Felicity Galvez (AUS), Eva Risztov



Yana Klochkova

Photo by Jamie MacDonald, Getty Images

(HUN), Georgina Lee (GBR), Kaitlin Sandeno (USA).

200 METER INDIVIDUAL MEDLEY

Just as we had in the 100 breast, we have five equally-talented women but only three medals to divvy up among them. The U.S. boasts Amanda Beard and 15-year-old Katie Hoff, ranked Nos. 1 and 3 in the world. Beard's two great virtues are speed and consistency. They should serve her well in this event. Australia will field Alice Mills, silver medalist in this event at last year's World Champs. Seventeen-year-old Teresa Rohmann made a tremendous jump all the way to second, but like Hoff, she lacks international experience. Finally, lurking in the background is Ukraine's Yana Klochkova, the defending Olympic champion. You call 'em.

Gold: Amanda Beard (USA)
Silver: Yana Klochkova (UKR)
Bronze: Katie Hoff (USA)

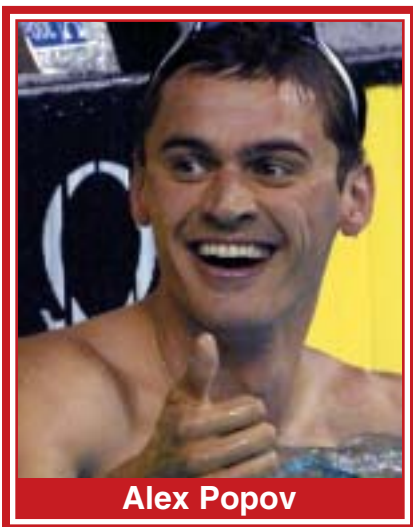
The Challengers: Teresa Rohmann (GER), Alice Mills (AUS).

400 METER INDIVIDUAL MEDLEY

What a race the 400 IM will be, pitting the queen of the medley, WR-holder and defending Olympic champ, Yana Klochkova, versus the heir apparent to Yana's throne, Katie Hoff. Having little respect for her elders, expect Katie to go hard and to go for the gold. We think she's capable of going 4:35 or even a bit better. But Yana should just be able to stem this youthful tide, perhaps for the last time. There should also be a five-way battle for the bronze, including the USA's Kaitlin Sandeno, Canada's Joanne Malar and Argentina's Georgina Bardach.

Gold: Yana Klochkova (UKR)
Silver: Katie Hoff (USA)
Bronze: Eva Risztov (HUN)

The Challengers: Joanne Malar (CAN), Kaitlin Sandeno (USA), Jen Reilly (AUS), Georgina Bardach (ARG).



Alex Popov

Photo by Andrea Comas, Reuters

The Challengers: The Netherlands, France, Sweden, Great Britain.

4 x 200 METER FREESTYLE RELAY

The last world record still on the books by the steroid-assisted East Germans is their 7:55.47 in this event from 1987. It should finally fall in Athens—perhaps beaten by the top three teams. There will be a three-way tussle for the gold, with the Brits most likely to put it all together when it counts.

- Gold:** Great Britain
- Silver:** Australia
- Bronze:** USA

The Challengers: Spain, France, Romania, Sweden.

MEN 50 METER FREESTYLE

How can you pick the winners of a race that consists of reaction time, a start, about 20 seconds of furious thrashing and a touch? It seems like a total crapshoot, in which luck plays a major role. Strangely, though, the same guys seem to wind up on the podium time and again. This is likely to be the final showdown between Alex Popov, Olympic gold medalist in 1992 and '96, and Gary Hall Jr., who shared the gold with teammate

4 x 100 METER MEDLEY RELAY

It should come down to the USA vs. Australia, with the Yanks getting the nod due to superiority in the backstroke. The Aussies hope to make up ground in the fly and freestyle legs. Germany should take bronze because they are strong in all four strokes. France is weak in the breaststroke; Britain will lose ground in breast and fly; Sweden falls well behind in the backstroke, as does Italy; Japan is weak in the free; while China is a great big question mark.

- Gold:** USA
- Silver:** Australia
- Bronze:** Germany

The Challengers: China, France, Great Britain, Sweden, Italy, Japan.

4 x 100 METER FREESTYLE RELAY

Traditionally, the Red, White and Blue have owned this event. Not anymore. Germany broke the American's monopoly with a WR two years ago, but this year, Australia seems to have what it takes to win the gold. Still, the Germans won't go down without a hard fight.

- Gold:** Australia
- Silver:** USA
- Bronze:** Germany



Ian Thorpe

Photo by Bill Collins

- Gold:** Gary Hall Jr. (USA)
- Silver:** Alex Popov (RUS)
- Bronze:** Roland Schoeman (RSA)

The Challengers: Jason Lezak (USA), Eduardo Lorente and Jorge Noriega (ESP), Ryk Neethling (RSA), Bart Kizierowski (POL), Lorenzo Vismara (ITA). A shame Britain's Mark Foster will not be in Athens.

100 METER FREESTYLE

The "Flying Dutchman," Pieter van den Hoogenband, is the only man ever to have broken 48 seconds...and

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Anthony Ervin in 2000. We give the nod this time to Hall, possibly with the 21.5 world record he's shooting for.

he's done it three times. He'll do it again in Athens. The USA's Jason Lezak has the strength and quickness to challenge Hoogie. Now, with his performance at Trials, he also has the confidence. Filippo Magnini is an up-and-comer. Popov, the 1992 and '96 champ, could medal. Of the two Ians (Thorpe and Crocker), short course world record holder Crocker has the better shot at a medal—even gold. Thorpe is still the best middle-distance swimmer in history.

Gold: Pieter v. d. Hoogenband (NED)
Silver: Jason Lezak (USA)
Bronze: Filippo Magnini (ITA)

The Challengers: Alex Popov (RUS), Ian Thorpe (AUS), Ian Crocker (USA).

200 METER FREESTYLE

This has to be one of the highlights of the Athens Games. You've got the four fastest men in history going head-to-head (-to-head-to-head) plus some other very fast fellows. Look for the "Thorpedo" to torpedo Hoogie, possibly with a sub-1:44 world record, avenging himself for the upset in 2000. Michael Phelps, Grant Hackett and possibly Klete Keller will battle for bronze.

Gold: Ian Thorpe (AUS)
Silver: Pieter v. d. Hoogenband (NED)
Bronze: Michael Phelps (USA)

The Challengers: Grant Hackett (AUS), Klete Keller (USA), Rick Say (CAN), Ryk Neethling (RSA).

400 METER FREESTYLE

For six years, Aussies Ian Thorpe and Grant Hackett have been head-and-shoulders above the rest of the world, going 1-2 in this event whenever it counted. They still are the two best 400-meter men in history, but now America's Klete Keller has joined their ranks—albeit as No. 3 on the totem pole. It's hard to see anyone but Italy's Massi Rosolino challenge these three for a medal.

Gold: Ian Thorpe (AUS)
Silver: Grant Hackett (AUS)
Bronze: Klete Keller (USA)

The Challengers: Massi Rosolino (ITA).

1500 METER FREESTYLE

As dominant as Thorpie has been in the 400 free, Grant Hackett has been even more so in the 1500. He



Pieter v.d. Hoogenband

hasn't lost a mile race in over six years, and his world record of 14:34.56 is a good 20 seconds better than any of his competitors. What's more, unlike in the past, Hackie has stayed healthy this year. Look for a world record by the greatest distance swimmer of all time. The rest of the field should improve to around the 14:50 mark with both Americans having a good chance to medal.

Gold: Grant Hackett (AUS)
Silver: Yuri Prilukov (RUS)
Bronze: David Davies (GBR)

The Challengers: Erik Vendt and Larsen Jensen (USA), Craig Stevens (AUS), Alexei Filipets (RUS), Dragos Coman (ROM), Kurt McGillivray (CAN), Graeme Smith (GBR).

100 METER BACKSTROKE

In 2000, Lenny Krayzelburg won three golds. Now—four years and three operations later—the torch has been passed to his successor, Aaron Peirsol. Look for Aaron to slash Lenny's WR of 53.60, as the U.S. goes for a sweep. Oddly, the U.S. Trials probably produced a tougher race than will the Olympics.

Gold: Aaron Peirsol (USA)
Silver: Matt Welsh (AUS)
Bronze: Lenny Krayzelburg (USA)

The Challengers: Ouyang Kunpeng (CHN), Tomori Morita (JPN), Marco

Facts and Figures

- The U.S. team has two sets of siblings: Klete and Kalyn Keller, and Tara and Dana Kirk. The Kirks are the first set of sisters to make a U.S. Olympic swim team, while the Kellers are the third brother-sister combination in U.S. Olympic history.
- Teri McKeever, coach of Natalie Coughlin, who was named to the coaching staff at the Olympic Trials, is the first woman ever to serve as a U.S. Olympic swimming coach.
- Four-time Olympian Jenny Thompson, 31, is the team's oldest woman, while Gary Hall Jr., at 29, is not only the oldest man on the team, but the oldest man to represent the United States in Olympic swimming since Duke Kahanamoku, who was 33 in 1924.
- Larsen Jensen, at 18, is the youngest man on the U.S. team. Fifteen-year-old Katie Hoff is the team's youngest woman. Overall, the men's team averages 23 years of age; the women's, 21.

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DiCarli (GER), Gregor Tait (GBR).

200 METER BACKSTROKE

Aaron Peirsol is even better at the 200 meter backstroke than the 100, and in Athens he'll be aiming to lower his WR of 1:54.74 set at Trials. With Michael Phelps out of the picture, the battle now will be for silver (rather than bronze).

Gold: Aaron Peirsol (USA)
Silver: Gregor Tait (GBR)
Bronze: Markus Rogan (AUT)

The Challengers: Matt Welsh (AUS), Simon Dufour (FRA), James Goddard (GBR), Razvan Florea (ROM), Bryce Hunt (USA).

100 METER BREASTSTROKE

In Long Beach, Brendan Hansen ravaged Kosuke Kitajima's year-old WR by almost half-a-second, clocking 59.30. Japan's Kitajima wants his record back, but Hansen has his eyes set on breaking 59 seconds. This should be a two-way battle, though British speedsters Darren Mew and James Gibson have no intention of rolling over for the big boys. Don't count out 50-meter WR-holder Oleg Lisogor or Russia's Roman Sloudnov, the first man under a minute.



Grant Hackett

Photo by Bill Collins

Gold: Brendan Hansen (USA)
Silver: Kosuke Kitajima (JPN)
Bronze: James Gibson (GBR)

The Challengers: Darren Mew (GBR), Hugues Dubosq (FRA), Mark Gangloff (USA), Oleg Lisogor (UKR), Roman Sloudnov (RUS).

200 METER BREASTSTROKE

Like the 100, the double century will feature WR-holder Hansen vs. former WR-holder Kitajima. The Japanese has a better shot in the longer race, but Hansen appears to be riding a tsunami that will give him two individual golds. Look for a 2:08. We like the USA's Scott Usher's chances for bronze—he keeps learning and improving with every race. Several other swimmers will challenge for bronze, including Australia's Jim Piper and Italy's Paolo Bossini. An intriguing challenger: Hungary's Dani Gyurta, just-turned 15.

Gold: Brendan Hansen (USA)
Silver: Kosuke Kitajima (JPN)
Bronze: Scott Usher (USA)

The Challengers: Jim Piper (AUS), Paolo Bossini (ITA), Ian Edmond (GBR), Dmitri Komornikov (RUS), Michael Brown (CAN), Grigori Falko (RUS), Dani Gyurta (HUN).

100 METER BUTTERFLY

Like Ali vs. Frazier, the Crocker vs. Phelps match-up never fails to intrigue. Since Michael took Ian's American record away in Fort Lauderdale, Ian has won both major showdowns—each time breaking the WR. In Round 2, at Trials, he lowered his own mark from 50.98 at last year's World Champs to 50.78, and he was only beginning his taper. Crocker has his sights set on history's first sub-50 100 meter fly in Athens, while Phelps says he wasn't tapered at all at Long Beach. Look for another WR in Athens, probably by Crocker.

Gold: Ian Crocker (USA)
Silver: Michael Phelps (USA)
Bronze: Andrei Serdinov (UKR)

The Challengers: Igor Marchenko (RUS), Todd Cooper (GBR), Corey Swanepoel (NZL), Takashi Yamamoto (JPN), Mike Mintenko (CAN).



George Bovell

Photo by Tim Morse

200 METER BUTTERFLY

World record holder Michael Phelps swam 1:54.31 at Trials, just off his global standard. No one else in the world is under 1:56, but ten men have swum 1:56s this year, with defending Olympic champ Tom Malchow right behind them. This race is Michael's, probably with a world record just for spice. We're going to go with 19-year-old Pawel Korzeniowski, an unknown on the world scene, for second. Malchow, who did not swim well at Trials, should get back on the podium, though Australia's Justin Norris has looked very tough.

Gold: Michael Phelps (USA)
Silver: Pawel Korzeniowski (POL)
Bronze: Tom Malchow (USA)

The Challengers: Justin Norris (AUS), Takeshi Matsuda and Takashi Yamamoto (JPN), Stephen Parry (GBR), Franck Esposito (FRA), Denis Sylantyev (UKR), Wu Peng (CHN).

200 METER INDIVIDUAL MEDLEY

This is a “gimme” for Michael, who stands some four seconds ahead of the rest of the field. Given how close the teen phenom came to breaking his WR of 1:55.94 at Trials after his 200 backstroke battle with Peirsol, it appears he can take his medley mark even lower in Athens. The battle will be for the minor medals, with five men coming into Athens with 1:59s and six more within half-a-second of that time. Sentimental favorite is former WR-holder Jani Sievinen of Finland. We think George Bovell will snare Trinidad’s first Olympic medal in swimming.

Gold: Michael Phelps (USA)
Silver: George Bovell (TRI)
Bronze: Thiago Pereira (BRA)

The Challengers: Ryan Lochte (USA), Markus Rogan (AUT), Jiro Miki (JPN), Laszlo Cseh (HUN), Justin Norris (AUS), Jani Sievinen (FIN).

400 METER INDIVIDUAL MEDLEY

Though Phelps hasn’t been quite as dominant in the 400 IM as in the shorter medley, he is the overwhelming favorite. What’s more, we probably haven’t seen yet what he’s capable of doing in this event. The guess here is that Mike will strut his stuff in Athens to the tune of 4:05 or 4:06. So, once again, the struggle will be for silver or bronze. Erik Vendt missed his taper in Long Beach; that is unlikely to recur in Athens. Look for Erik to do battle with Hungary’s Laszlo Cseh and Italy’s Alessio Boggiatto for second or third.

Gold: Michael Phelps (USA)
Silver: Laszlo Cseh (HUN)
Bronze: Erik Vendt (USA)

The Challengers: Alessio Boggiatto and Luca Marin (ITA), Jiro Miki and Susumi Tabuchi (JPN), Adrian

Turner (GBR), Wu Peng (CHN).

4 x 100 METER MEDLEY RELAY

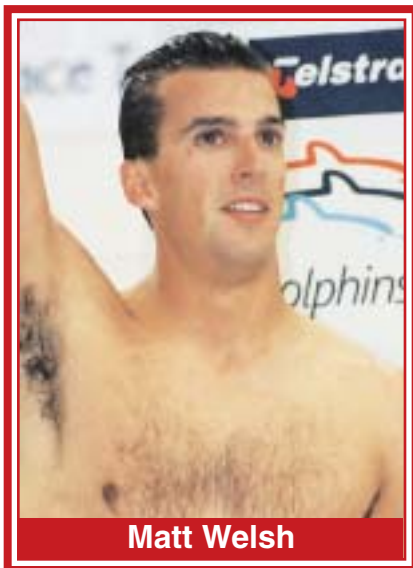
With WR-holders Aaron Peirsol, Brendan Hansen and Ian Crocker swimming the first three legs, the Stars and Stripes are massive favorites—even if, as he threatens to do, head coach Eddie Reese swims the anchor. Australia looks to be second best. Britain, though weak on the freestyle leg, should take bronze. Russia, Ukraine, France and Hungary all have fatal weaknesses.

Gold: USA
Silver: Australia
Bronze: Great Britain

The Challengers: Russia, Ukraine, France, Hungary.

4 x 100 METER FREESTYLE RELAY

Four years ago, Gary Hall Jr. predicted the USA would “play (the Aussies) like guitars,” as he fingered an air-riff. Instead, it was the lads from Down Under who played some sweet golden music, setting a WR that still stands. It won’t last after Athens, but who will own it remains unclear. The U.S. has the greatest depth, but that might not



Matt Welsh

Photo by Bill Collins



Kosuke Kitajima

Photo by Victor Fraile, Reuters

do the trick. The Aussies need a healthy Michael Klim to have a shot at gold, and the “Shaved One” may just come through in the clutch. At least four teams could win it all.

Gold: USA
Silver: Italy
Bronze: South Africa

The Challengers: Australia, Russia, France.

4 x 200 METER FREESTYLE RELAY

Just as the USA “owns” the medley relay, Australia claims as national property the 4 x 200 free relay. And, in recent years, they have dominated the event. No more. With Michael Klim hurt and Daniel Kowalski retired, the Aussies, though still strong, look vulnerable. Their 1-2 guys (Thorpe and Hackett) have an edge on the Americans’ 1-2 guys (Phelps and Keller). But the Yanks appear to be stronger for the third and fourth spots. Should be a great race.

Gold: Australia
Silver: USA
Bronze: South Africa

The Challengers: Russia, France, Great Britain.