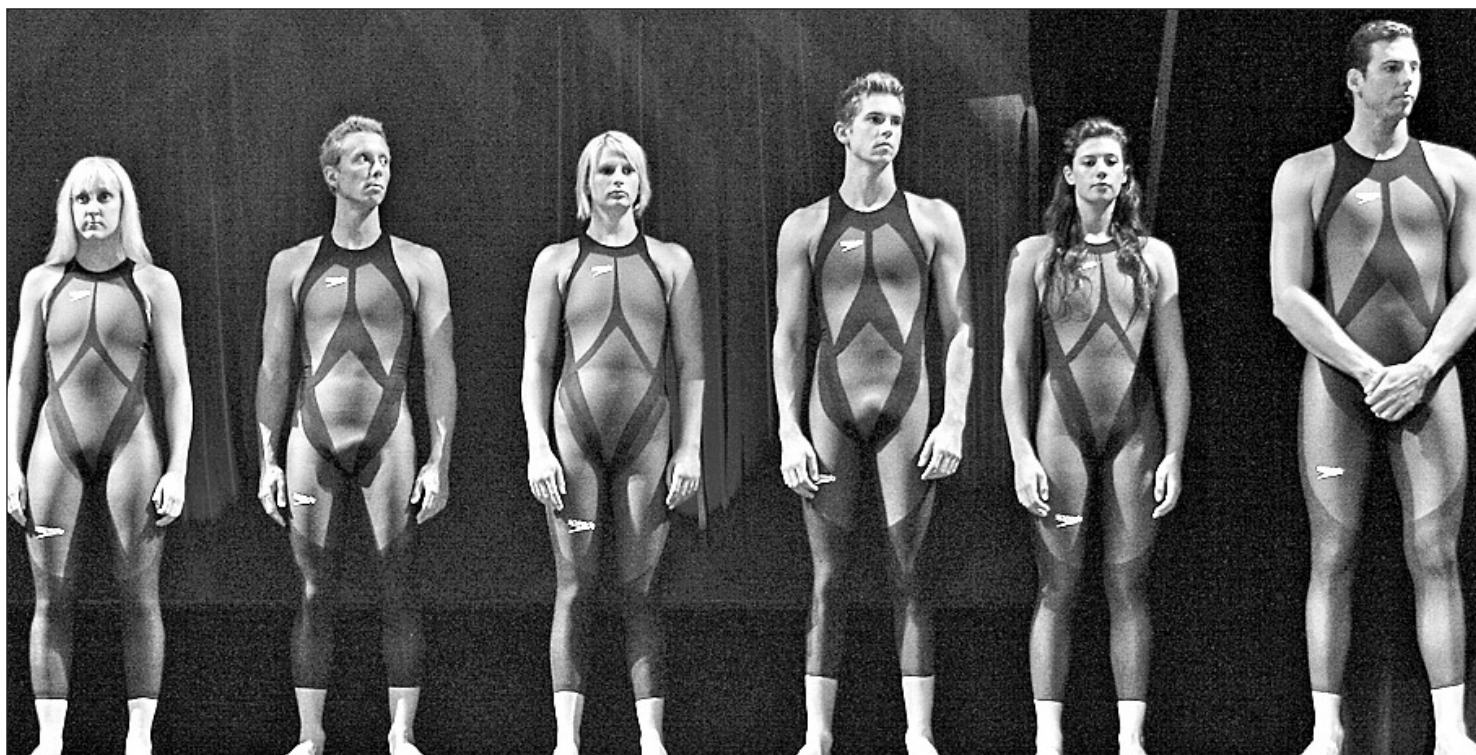
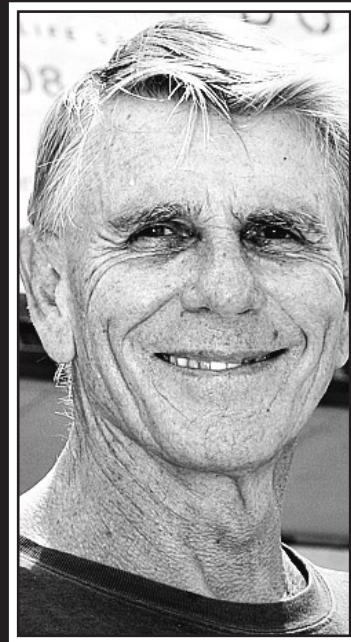


Technology creates unfair playing field

Suit blowing world times out of water



Hi-tech: Jessicah Schipper, Dean Kent (NZ), Leisel Jones, Eamon Sullivan, Stephanie Rice and Grant Hackett in the Speedo LZR racer

by James Hooper

OLYMPIC champion Murray Rose has questioned the legitimacy of Speedo's new LZR Racer after three world records were posted in 24 days.

The common theme appears to be the new high-tech suit, which was shrouded in secrecy until its release on February 12.

"My coach reckons if I put on one of these things that I'd go 10 seconds faster in the 400. I said 'you've got to be kidding'," said Rose, 69, who is among our greatest Olympians.

"Any time you introduce performance-enhancing technology into a sport the playing field becomes a little less even."

When asked if the suits had something to do with the deluge of world records, Rose

replied: "There's absolutely no question about it."

This is the story everyone in the swimming world will tell you is not a story, but the facts speak for themselves.

Zimbabwe's Kirsty Coventry set the first of the world records in the new suit in the 200m backstroke at Missouri Grand Prix last month, breaking Hungarian Krisztina Egerzegi's 1991 mark.

Then US backstroker Natalie Coughlin broke her own world record in the 100m at the same meet.

The Australian swimmers aiming to make a big splash in Beijing have also been cruising courtesy of the new suits.

Eamon Sullivan's arrival as the world's fastest 50m free-

style swimmer was achieved in an LZR Racer suit.

But perhaps the most intriguing time was the one posted just last week, when teen sensation Emily Seebohm clocked a time just 0.01sec outside the 50m backstroke world record at a school carnival.

Her decision to put on the new suit for the event delivered a lot more than just the quick swim her coach Matt Brown had predicted.

"We thought she should put the new suit on for the 50m backstroke and see what happens and 28.10sec was the result," Brown said.

Plenty of other elite swimmers around the world have posted personal best times and Speedo think they have plenty

to do with the new records, claiming them on their website.

Not all swimmers at the Australian Olympic trials at Homebush starting on March 22 will have access to the controversial new suits.

Those not provided with them by Speedo — selection in an Australian team is usually a pre-requisite — must buy their own at \$600 each.

"A lot of people don't have access to the suits, so that makes it a little less even than it used to be," Rose said.

"In my day all you had to remember was an old swimsuit and a towel and don't even worry about the goggles.

"I just have some concerns when technology is such an important factor in success."

Balogh loses Beijing shootout

by Chris Wilson

OLYMPIC gold medallist Suzie Balogh yesterday won the Australia Cup final in Sydney, but lost the chance to defend her Olympic trap shooting title in Beijing.

Balogh vowed to continue competing until London 2012, but the Athens gold medallist took a shot at the Olympic qualification process.

Balogh praised friend Stacey Roiall for her consistency over the four rounds of qualification, the Victorian shooter securing her Olympic place with a nine-shot advantage.

But Balogh was extremely disappointed that international results and finals in the Australian rounds were not taken into consideration.

"I'm shooting better than ever internationally, I've just had bad trials and didn't meet the goalposts that were set. So be it," Balogh said.

"When you look at the people who win medals internationally, they perform well at big occasions overseas and they perform well in finals. You're kind of cutting out what makes an elite shot."

Roiall said Balogh was gracious in defeat yesterday.

"She came up and gave me a hug and big kiss and said 'it's absolutely great for you'," Roiall said.

"I've been shooting very well, we're both very competitive."

Roiall took up shooting after walking into the general store at her hometown of Werribee in 1996 and hearing local hero Russell Mark had won gold.

She became more serious in 2002, two years after her elder sister Lisa died of cancer.

"My family and I needed an interest to take our minds off things, so I sat down with them and said to them 'how about we give shooting a go?'" Roiall said.



Off target: Suzie Balogh