

RECORDS

Upon reading Talbot's comments, Bowman used the locker room fodder to his advantage, making sure his prodigy read the remarks. Michael admitted later that he went into the World Championships with extra motivation. It showed. In an astonishing performance, he medaled six times and set five world records. Michael won the 200-meter butterfly with a new world mark (1:59.93), and also turned in record times in the 100-meter butterfly (51.47 seconds) and 200-meter individual medley (1:56.04)—doing so on the same day, which was a first in swimming history. He concluded his eye-popping run with a gold in the 400-meter relay.

Life

Phelps was a good athlete, and passed his ability on to his kids. All three got into swimming at an early age. Hilary showed real promise, particularly in the butterfly, but eventually gave up the sport. Whitney stuck with it much longer. One of the better swimmers in her area, she tried out for the U.S. Olympic team in 1996 at the age of 15. Michael was among those in attendance to cheer her on. When Whitney didn't qualify, he was left devastated like the rest of the family. Ultimately, her career was cut short by a series of herniated disks.





REWARDS

Of course, Michael's season was building toward the Olympics in Athens. So was the buzz surrounding him. Could he top Mark Spitz and the seven gold medals he won in 1972? Speedo offered a \$1 million bounty if he matched Spitz, ratcheting up the already immense pressure Michael faced heading into the U.S. Olympic



ON THE RISE TO CHAMPION

In 1999, Michael earned a spot on the U.S. National B Team. At the Junior Nationals, he broke a record in the 200-meter butterfly for the 20-year-old age group. Michael's ascent through the U.S. swimming ranks accelerated in 2000. At the Spring Nationals, he finished third in the 200-meter butterfly. Weeks later at the Olympic Trials, he lined up against Malchow and others in the same event, intent on securing a spot on the American team. Unfazed by this heady company, he placed second and earned the right to represent his country in Sydney, Australia.

At 15, Michael became the youngest swimmer to compete for the U.S. in the Olympics in 68 years. He acquitted himself well, touching the wall in fifth place in the 200-meter butterfly. Michael ended the year ranked 7th in the world in the 200-meter butterfly and 44th in the 400-meter individual medley.