

## 'Soba' slurper's 399 bowls too tough to beat

Compiled from Kyodo, Staff report

Japanese food fighter Takeru Kobayashi, famed for his success at the annual Coney Island hot dog-eating contest — step aside. The new bottomless pit just slammed down dozens of small red "wanko" bowls of "soba" buckwheat noodles.

After wolfing down 399 bowls of the traditional noodles in 10 minutes Sunday, Hatsuyo Sugawara, 45, from Morioka, Iwate Prefecture, beat other contenders in the annual All-Japan Wanko Soba Eating Championship held in the city known for the noodles.

Like Kobayashi, she calls herself a food fighter. Her nickname is "the Witch."

Competition rules require one bowl to hold 10 grams of noodles, or about a tenth the size of a usual soba serving in a restaurant. Sugawara's 399 bowls, therefore, translate to nearly 40 regular bowls.

Sugawara's win was her third in a row since she joined the competition three years ago. Three consecutive wins in the race mark a milestone, the organizer said.

Sugawara beat second-place Yuko Shoji by more than 100 bowls. Shoji ended up with 295 bowls.

"Thanks to the rhythmic work of the lady who served me the bowls, I managed to concentrate on eating," Sugawara said.

Last year, Sugawara ate 383 bowls. Because she was a record holder, tougher rules were imposed — she was given only 10 minutes, while others were allowed to keep eating for 15 minutes.

To a majority of participants, however, 15 minutes were far from sufficient. Some turned pale as they kept on pushing the noodles down their throats, while others frequently jumped up and down, hoping gravity would help.



**Noodle queen: Hatsuyo "the Witch" Sugawara wolfs down bowls of "soba" noodles Sunday during an eating competition in Morioka, Iwate Prefecture.** KYODO PHOTO

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