

# SPORTS

## Chicago's Pat Bertoletti will eat anything for athletic glory

# Gobble head

By Jerry Soverinsky  
FOR REDEYE

This guy can't be the guy.

Sitting quietly in a chair at a North Side coffee shop, with his hooded sweat shirt drooping off his shoulders, his face seems withdrawn. He's almost shy—not at all like the person who devoured 170 chicken wings in 30 minutes at last month's Wing Bowl in Philadelphia.

But a quick check of his ID verifies it's him: Pat Bertoletti, 21. The world's third-ranked competitive eater.

At 6-foot-2 and a lean 185 pounds, the Palos Heights native's eating accomplishments defy comprehension: 19 slices of pizza in 10 minutes; 11 corned beef sandwiches in 10 minutes; 4½ key lime pies in 8 minutes. The list goes on and on.

"Most people think these contests are probably just a bunch of 400-pound guys stuffing themselves, but that's almost never the case," the Kendall College culinary student explained. "Most of the top people are pretty fit—not fat—which I think allows their stomachs to expand more than an overweight challenger's."

At the top of the sport is 160-pound Takeru Kobayashi, better known as "The Tsunami."

"The guy is just amazing, so focused," said Bertoletti, who ranks just above 105-pound Sonya Thomas, "The Black Widow."

But Bertoletti doesn't seem too full of himself now that he's beginning to dominate the sport. And make no mistake, competitive eating is a sport.

And a fiercely competitive business. Tens of thousands of dollars are at stake for the game's top prize-winners.

Bertoletti won \$2,500 after easily outpacing second-ranked eater Joey Chestnut at December's Chock Full O' Nuts World Date Nut Bread Eating Championship at New York's Madison Square Garden.

Bertoletti will next compete in the St. Patrick's Day Chowdown, which will air on SpikeTV at 6 p.m. March 17.

**Pat Bertoletti scarfed whole turkeys at last year's Thanksgiving Invitational Turkey Eating Championship.**

### SNACK ATTACKER

Pat Bertoletti holds 10 IFOCE-recognized competitive-eating records.

FOOD	QUANTITY	TIME	DATE SET
Whole turkeys	4 pounds, 12.8 ounces	12 minutes	Nov. 22, 2006
Kolaches	44 cherry kolaches	8 minutes	Sept. 2, 2006
Jalapenos (pickled)	177 peppers	15 minutes	Aug. 26, 2006
16-inch pizza	19 slices	10 minutes	Aug. 12, 2006
Strawberry rhubarb pie	7.9 pounds	8 minutes	July 29, 2006
Ice cream (short form)	1.75 gallons	8 minutes	May 26, 2006
Key lime pie	10.8 pounds	8 minutes	March 21, 2006
Corned beef and cabbage	5.75 pounds	10 minutes	March 16, 2006
Chocolate	1 pound, 15.5-ounce hearts	7 minutes	Feb. 13, 2006
Corned beef sandwiches	11 8-ounce sandwiches	10 minutes	Jan. 11, 2006

The event in Savannah, Ga., features the top eight eaters competing in a three-round, bracket-style tournament with beef tongue, corned beef and cabbage, and green doughnuts.

Bertoletti's competitive strategy is simple: "I just try to focus and push myself. Every time I'm at a contest, I like to see how far it takes me to get to my breaking point."

That threshold has become harder to reach since he began eating for sport in 2004 at the suggestion of his sister. He entered a local pizza-eating contest and finished fourth. Bertoletti later registered with the International Federation of Competitive Eating, which regulates the contests for safety.

He committed to an aggressive 2006 schedule that's included more than 30 competitions. Each event offers

up to \$10,000, and Bertoletti estimates that he has won more than \$55,000 since he went pro.

It's a decent haul for a college student. And while he's managed to "put away a few dollars," a large part of his winnings have gone toward travel expenses. Competitors pay their own way to IFOCE contests.

Unlike other sports, highly ranked competitive eaters rarely train in a traditional sense.

"I'm not seeing how many hot dogs I can eat twice a week or anything like that," Bertoletti said. Rather, a few days before a competition, he tries to refine his technique. "I'll eat for just one or two minutes, trying to figure out the fastest way to eat it. But that's it."

Besides, a college budget doesn't allow for a huge grocery bill. His refrigerator "is usually empty," and he eats the majority of his meals at school. Those modest offerings are far from the 177 pickled jalapeno peppers that he devoured in 15 minutes earlier this year.

Jalapenos are just one of several foods Bertoletti isn't particularly fond of but has had to wolf down for the sake of competition. "I don't really like them, but I can eat them for the challenge," he said.

He also has managed to recover from post-contest weight gains that can reach up to 18 pounds. "It sounds like a lot, but it's mostly water," he said. "I'm back to my normal weight within three days."

Bertoletti, who holds 10 IFOCE records, has his own strategy for easier chewing, which involves dunking food in a homemade mixture of lemonade and raspberry flavoring.

But he knows that few if any tricks could put him on par with Kobayashi—the Japanese phenom has never lost on American soil.

Bertoletti's happy with just reaching his full potential, he said.

"I suppose as long as I continue to improve, I'll stick with it. Either that, or until it's no longer fun."







"I just try to focus and push myself. Every time I'm at a contest, I like to see how far it takes me to get to my breaking point," says competitive eater Pat Ber-toletti, shown here at the recent Chock Full O' Nuts World Date Nut Bread Eating Championship at New York's Madison Square Garden. He finished first.

## CANINE LINES

By Whizzer

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### 1 Greens fees

Welcome to Chicago, U.S. Olympic Committee inspectors. Please have some of our "cabbage" with the presidents' faces on it.

### 2 Taking a pass

Barack Obama, while you're in town, let's talk. You need a ticket to a Big Ten tournament game; I need to be on your presidential ticket.

### 3 Red hosed

With three strikeouts in his first time out, Boston's Dice-K showed a knack for putting people down. He's just like Dice Clay, only with talent.

### 4 Kool aide

David Kool of Western Michigan is the MAC's pick for top freshman and my pick for top name. His name is so, well, his name.

### 5 Pep squad

Welcome, Pep Hamilton. No one's better qualified at helping Rex Grossman with how to step. You see, pep in your step is a saying, and never mind.

### 6 British humor

Welcome to you, too, Charles London. Mr. London, we just happen to have a Big Ben at the United Center; I'll set up a meeting.

### 7 Jet fooled

I've thought some more about the Thomas Jones trade, and here are my thoughts: Hello, Chicago P.D.? I'd like to report a robbery.

### 8 His position

Right now, Lance Briggs is thinking, "I should have played running back."

### 9 Sound familiar?

Get ready to hear a lot of this phrase from Lovie Smith this fall: "Cedric Benson is our running back." Run for the hills, kids!

## FIVE THINGS ...

- ... to help get over Thomas Jones:
- >> Make a cardboard cutout
- >> Write; hope he writes back
- >> Sign Tom Jones. It's not unusual
- >> Add his, Lance Briggs' photos to wine collection
- >> Stalking