



Flay in the kitchen.

Bobby vows to Flay the 'Iron Chef'

By MICHAEL GILTZ

THE campy Japanese cooking show "Iron Chef" returns to America for one-on-one battles between top U.S. names like Mario Batali of New York's Babbo and Wolfgang Puck and Japanese counterparts.

Up first tonight at 9 p.m. on the Food Network: Bobby Flay takes on Hiroyuki Sakai.

It won't be easy for Flay

to win: Sakai has competed in more than 80 "Iron Chef" face-offs and he's never lost when the main dish is fish. The item Sakai and Flay have to tackle? Trout.

"The Japanese chefs take [the show] incredibly seriously," says Flay. "They put their pride and reputation on the line."

Certainly Flay's pride was wounded when he first competed on "Iron Chef" four years ago.

"I cut my finger," admits the 39-year-old Flay. "I cut my finger. I had a tough time with the pressure."

Not surprisingly, he lost. "I was a little pissed," Flay admits. "In this competition, there's no substitute for experience."

That experience came in handy when Flay went to Japan for a rematch and won.

Viewers who tune in to "Iron Chef" will see Flay serving a soup in an over-

flowing coconut shell, a subtle nod to Japan.

"I got the idea from the sake," says Flay. "They have the square, wooden cups and they always overflow them. I asked someone about it and they said it's about abundance."

In the "Iron Chef" finale airing Sunday at 10 p.m., Flay and Masaharu Morimoto take on Hiroyuki Sakai and Batali. But Flay, despite "Iron Chef" and the shows he hosts for

Food Network, still focuses on his restaurants.

"I haven't opened a restaurant in 10 years," says Flay, who has a Mesa Grill opening this fall in Las Vegas as well as a new book, "Boy Gets Grill: 125 Reasons to Light Your Fire," due out next month. "My restaurants [take up] 90 percent of my time. The great thing about the Food Network is you shoot a little bit and they show them a lot."

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