

'Lady Beast' fights for girl gamers in Japan

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Visitors to the Tokyo Game Show are left in little doubt they are entering a male-dominated world.

In her online world, she is "Lady Beast", deftly operating her green monster Blanka in dizzying hand-to-hand streetfighting combat on the global professional gaming circuit.

In real life, she is Yuko Momochi, a 31-year-old slender Japanese woman with short hair dyed light brown, who is hoping to encourage more girls into the male-dominated world of professional gaming.

A former car saleswoman, Momochi got her break in competitive gaming in 2011 after she defeated a previously invincible character in a Street Fighter match, earning her a sponsorship offer from an American team.

She was Japan's first female professional gamer and now also spends her time hosting events and searching for female talent who could one day turn pro.

"My parents wanted me to be a civil servant," she laughs at an interview with AFP on the sidelines of the Tokyo Game Show, one of the world's largest. "A girl raised by steady parents has turned out like this!"

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The violent world of online gaming also tends to appeal more to men, Momochi told AFP.

"When I started going to [game](#) arcades, I was playing fighting games, which meant it's all men around you. It was tough to get in there alone," she recalled.

As they are so small in number, female gamers stand out and attract attention, not always positive, she said.

"You often hear names like 'bitch'. It's fine if you can take it but normally you'd be hurt," she said.

'Street Fighter V'

Momochi started gaming at a young age, playing Donkey Kong and other video games with her brother.



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She recalled how her mother would unplug the computer after a few hours. Up until recently, her parents disapproved of her career, only softening their opposition slightly in recent years.

Momochi tasted some success in the competitive world of gaming, clinching second place in a Singapore competition in 2011 and getting into the top eight at a Tokyo Game Show event in 2013.

And now she has launched a group—"Project Gaming Girls" or P2G—to encourage women and girls players, whether professional or amateur.

"I want to share the joy you can get from gaming. Gaming itself was fun but socialising with my opponent after the fight was also fun," she said.

One of the women in the P2G group, a nurse from central Japan who gave her name only as Harumi, travels hundreds of kilometres to compete in online game battles.

She lost her "Street Fighter V" battle on the big stage but vowed to improve. "I've liked fighting games since I was five or so. From the very first moment I played them, I was so impressed and I've been playing ever since."



Women are still heavily outnumbered at gaming events

Mika Sawae, an art director at a Tokyo firm, took a day off to join some 40 other players—including just a few women—for a simultaneous play battle.

She said she was seeing more and more women at gaming events.

"I think it's because the industry is more open to women compared to before when games were designed for core fans," she said.

A co-fighter, Yuka Sugiyama, agreed: "What was not accepted as being played by women is accepted now ... I grew up being told not to be aggressive but I enjoy playing (fighting games) now."

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