

We tried it: The POP connected tennis wristband

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Courtesy of Babolat

It can be hard to measure your play when it comes to tennis. Yes, you can keep score in a match and go by that, or you can consider the points you've kept in play and any winners you've hit. But how do your strokes look? Are you hitting flat? How much spin are you putting on the ball? Are you working your forehand as much and as well as your backhand?

I'm always looking to better my game, so I was excited to learn about the [Babolat POP](#), a wristband that tracks your stats.

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How it works

For me, the best technology is easy to use and doesn't have a long, drawn-out setup, which is the case with Babolat POP. You download the app on your phone, sign up and charge the sensor. You'll create a profile on the app too, where you can add personal info and a photo if

you want (this will come into play if you challenge friends). Then place the sensor into the bracelet, put the bracelet on your dominant wrist and go play.

What I liked

The POP is not distracting at all while you're playing. The bracelet is made of a cloth material that comfortably fits on any size wrist, and it records everything in the background (read: you don't have to hit a button every time you want a shot recorded).

After you complete a session, it takes just a couple minutes to sync the data to your phone -- and I've never had the sync freeze on me mid-transfer, which is lovely. You also can say where you played (indoors versus outdoors) and on what type of surface (hard court versus clay), if you like keeping track of that kind of data.

The POP has the ability to record each forehand, backhand, overhead, smash, volley and serve, and it totals the amount for you. The sensor breaks it down further, classifying how many shots were flat versus slices, as well as your topspin. I found this really insightful, especially in a game when I knew I was more dominantly hitting backhands but no real winners -- it was because a lot of my shots were flat. Knowing that, the next time I stepped on the court, I made a point to work on hitting my backhand with a bit more topspin, so I could win more points with that shot.

The POP also provides what they call a PIQScore, or a score based on a combination of your style, speed and spin. Style? Although it isn't able to record how beautiful you look while hitting a cross-court forehand, the sensor picks up on the fluidity of your strokes, which is where this number comes from. At first, I didn't think I was all too interested in a "made up" score the company came up with, but after using the POP bracelet for a bit, I found myself comparing my PIQScore from session to session. It's basically a quick overview if you had to sum up your session with one score, which became more appealing when looking at improvement over time.

The POP also records "activity," which is based on the length and intensity of your session. This made it easy for me to identify which of my sessions were actual games versus just casual rallying with a friend. It also tells you after each session what your top hitting speed was and the amount of shots in your lengthiest rally. Again, this data I just found interesting, and I even surprised myself a few times with a top speed I didn't know I was able to hit.

Then there's the challenge aspect of the Babolat POP -- because what tracking device doesn't allow you to compete with others these days, right? First, you have the ability to find your friends who have POP and add them to your network by following them. I wasn't looking to use the device to compete, but rather to up my own game. Still, you have the option to create a challenge: forehands, backhands or serves and the number of shots taken. Each shot gets a PIQScore, which is averaged and then used to determine the winner of the challenge. It's a fun way to add a little competition to the mix, if you're looking for that.

What I didn't like

Although the POP generally recorded pretty accurately, I found that it sometimes had issues differentiating between types of shots. For instance, in a match in which I hit a couple overhead shots, they were recorded as serves. It wasn't a huge deal to me, but I didn't get much feedback on my overhead shots, which I would have liked.

I know this would be taking the device capabilities to the next level, but I wished it knew how many shots were in. I found it really helpful to break down my shots, top spin and speed, but what if my fastest shots were all going out (at one point, they were)? From glancing at my stats on the app, you'd think these were the best shots, when in fact, I probably needed to take a little speed off to keep the ball in play and not lose the point.

Worth it?

I'm the type of person who always likes to improve -- whether it's tennis or snowboarding or public speaking. I like that the Babolat POP can give me some specific feedback and stats on my tennis game that I otherwise would have needed to figure out on my own or with the help of an instructor or coach, which can be costly.

Although it wasn't 100 percent accurate, this gave me more insight into my game than I had previously. At \$90, the Babolat POP isn't cheap, but for someone like me, I'd say it's worth it.