

Tyler Benson has lived up to the hype in first season with Vancouver Giants

ca.sports.yahoo.com/blogs/jrhockey-buzzing-the-net/tyler-benson-has-lived-up-to-the-hype-in-first-season-with-vancouver-giants-1

By Israel Fehr

3/16/2015



VANCOUVER – Tyler Benson knew his first full season with the Vancouver Giants was going to be the most challenging year of his young hockey career.

The No. 1 overall pick in the 2013 WHL bantam draft arrived in Vancouver [saddled with high expectations](#), and while the Giants are [likely to miss the playoffs](#) Benson has certainly made a strong impression.

He seems to always find the puck, isn't afraid to finish his checks, and plays a complete game that's rare for a player of his age. Benson has put up 44 points (14 goals, 30 assists) in 60 games, fine numbers by any standard and especially impressive for a 16-year-old on a struggling team. Benson, who just turned 17 on Mar. 15, credits the support he's received from those around him, including his older brother Cole who [plays for the Edmonton Oil Kings](#), for pointing him in the right direction.

"I've had lots of friends and my brother go through it, so they kind of helped me out," said Benson. "I've been really excited to play in this league. It's something I've looked forward to and I've enjoyed the season with these guys."

Benson does admit, though, that this season has been full of adjustments and learning lessons. He spent most of his 15-year-old season with the Pursuit of Excellent program in Kelowna, B.C., but did play seven games for the Giants [as an underage call-up](#). That experience, which was cut short after he suffered a sprained MCL, gave him an

idea of the trials and tribulations he was going to face.

"It's a tough league. Guys are a lot of bigger, a lot faster," said Benson. "You really have to think the game well out there because you don't have much time with the puck or without the puck."

Even for a player with Benson's pedigree – he had an Alberta-record 146 points in 33 games for the SSAC Bantam 'AAA' Lions in Edmonton and followed that up with 95 points in 49 games for the Pursuit of Excellence U18's – making the jump to major junior isn't easy.

He's been forced to sharpen his game, working his mind just as hard as he works his skates.

"You have to think a lot quicker out there and when you have the puck you have to know what to do with it right away," said Benson. "The space isn't there. You can't really do as much with the puck. You have to play a lot more of a team game. There are split-second decisions out there and you have to make decisions quick."

And over and over again, he's been making the right decisions.

"For a 16-year-old player, Tyler Benson plays like a man," Giants coach Claude Noel [told Global BC earlier this season](#). "He's got really good power, he hits, he's physical, he's got really good hockey sense."

The CHL announced Friday that Vancouver will [host the 2016 Top Prospects game](#), and Benson will undoubtedly be the showcase's star attraction. He's fully aware of what that means and isn't shying away from the added attention.

"It's in my home rink and I know the place pretty well," said Benson. "It's good for the city and I think it's exciting."

It will be far from the only time that the spotlight will be focused on Benson. The buzz around him will only intensify as the 2016 NHL draft gets closer.

Between the comparisons to fellow highly-touted draft-eligible winger Auston Matthews that are sure to come and trying to get the Giants back to the playoffs, Benson's going to be in for a busy year. Good thing he's proven to be more than up to the task and sets a high bar for himself.

"I want to get faster, bigger, stronger and be able to come next year and try to dominate," said Benson.

Watch out WHL, your notice has been served. When Tyler Benson hits the ice with the Vancouver Giants next season, he knows he'll be better than ever before. Considering what he's already accomplished, it should be a sight to behold.

[Israel Fehr](#) is a writer for [Yahoo Canada Sports](#). Email him at israelfehr@yahoo.ca or follow him on Twitter. [Follow @israelfehr](#)