Late last February Chicago and Carolina swapped talented and underachieving forwards in Tuomo Ruutu and Andrew Ladd. Ruutu was drafted ninth overall in 2001, while Ladd went even higher at fourth in 2006. Both came into the league with a lot of expectations and on the whole both failed to deliver. This trade did not register anything more than a minor blip in the fantasy hockey world, but it should have.

In 2003-2004 Ruutu played all 82 games and potted 44 points, but besides that stretch of health his time in Chicago was plagued with injuries. He plays a physical, reckless style so the fact that he missed so many games did not really surprise anyone. His offensive game began to stagnate in Chicago and the Hawks wanted to take things a different direction when they decided to put him on the block. In Carolina, the Hurricanes were becoming impatient with Ladd's inability to produce anything offensively, as he failed to break his 11 goal output from 2006-2007. This deal seemed like a natural one; both teams and both players were looking for a fresh start from their respective situations.

And now for a closer analysis:

Prior to the trade (which occurred at the end of February, 2008), Ladd was having a brutal season in Carolina. Before the All-Star break (the first 30 games of the season), he registered only five goals and eight total points. However, things began to turn around for him, even before the trade. Prior to being dealt, he finished his career as a Hurricane with four goals and 10

points in the 13 games between the All-Star break and the trade.

After being dealt, Ladd put up 12 points in the final 20 games of the season as a Blackhawk. His ice-time jumped from 11 minutes a night to 15. He has not missed a beat with that progression this season, as he is currently on pace for over 50 points, and already has eight goals, just three shy of his previous season-high. He is also on pace for close to 200 shots on goal, and is benefiting from chemistry with Dave Bolland and the surprisingly-healthy Martin Havlat. Ladd is a big guy and just needed some time to get going. The trade helped him develop at a faster rate, but it looks like he was on his way to improving his offensive game before leaving Carolina.

Ruutu was also struggling last season with Chicago. Before the trade, he had a measly 21 points in 60 games with Chicago, and was playing close to 15 minutes a night. After the trade, he was given an opportunity to see some regular power-play time, and his production jumped. As a Hurricane, he put up 11 points in 17 games after the trade, and his ice-time rose from just over 15 minutes a night to 17. This season he is on pace for over 20 goals and close to 50 points, and is playing over 18 minutes a game.

It is rare to see such a mutually beneficial deal in the cap era, as player-for-player trades are become increasingly rare. In the long run Ladd is the better of the two to own fantasy-wise, as he is younger, has more offensive upside, and is in a better situation. But both players have rejuvenated their careers, and fantasy values.