Every year, fantasy managers try to guess which Russian players will cross the pond. And despite the recent issues with NHL/KHL ties, a number of players are expected to report. Two players to watch are Maxim Goncharov and Igor Makarov.

Goncharov, 20, is an offensive defenseman drafted by the Phoenix Coyotes in the fifth round of the 2007 NHL Entry Draft. He played quite silently in the first couple of pro hockey seasons, as he was really young, but he broke out in the 2008-09 campaign with a 14-point performance (seven goals). He also had a very good WJC campaign with five goals, one of them in the famous WJC semifinal match when team Russia lost to Canada in the shootout.

The CSKA Moscow product started slowly this year, but nevertheless finished with 17 points. But what's more important, he earned three more minutes of average ice time, logging more than 15 per game.

Goncharov's KHL contract will run out in April and he said numerous times that he is interested in joining the Coyotes. In some interviews he also added that he was in touch with Phoenix management and that he would agree to play in the AHL, where he would need to spend at least a year to polish his defensive and offensive play. He has a very good shot from the point and a high level of technique. While he doesn't have a Sergei Zubov-like ceiling, he can certainly develop into a NHL impact player and a powerplay specialist, a category that fantasy managers tend to like.

Igor Makarov's situation is a tad different. Not only because he already tried to break his NHL team's lineup (Chicago Blackhawks), but also because of what he said earlier this season. Things like "going to North America now would be a waste of time". A product of the Krylya Sovetov hockey academy, Makarov is a quick winger who likes to hit and has good hands. He had a rocky fourth season with SKA S. Petersburg and was consequently traded to Dynamo Moscow. But in Moscow he didn't get back on track. He played only 10 minutes a game, roughly the same time he spent on the ice with SKA, and scored just three points in 25 contests, fewer than the six in 26 he recorded in St. Petersburg.

But in spite of the bad numbers he remains an appealing young player because of the aforementioned qualities. The Hawks may give him a second chance this summer, even with their deep roster, though it would be obviously be difficult for the Moscow native to break directly into the NHL. But if he accepts that he will spend some time in the AHL he might develop into a solid second line player.

Let’s remember that Nikita Filatov and Viktor Tikhonov are only loaned to the KHL and thus, most likely, they will report back to the NHL this summer. While Tikhonov seems more driven in getting back to NHL competition, Filatov looked a bit more hesitant as he declared two or three times that he’d remain in Russia if necessary. But now that his nemesis, Ken Hitchcock, has been fired, Nikita will look at America more favorably.