Over the last half decade most teams have developed a three season program for transitioning their AHL scoring stars to NHL top-six forwards. It's a fairly simple formula but it's amazingly consistent.

Once a player proves they can score at the AHL level, usually among the top-20 scorers, the team will sign the player to a two-way contract. This second, transition year gives teams a chance to get a better read on a player's development. It can mean anywhere between six to sixty NHL games, but almost always sees the player contribute in both leagues. The final year is the one-way contract year, where the player gets every opportunity to crack the top-six and produce in the NHL.

Nashville's Cal O'Reilly bucked this trend slightly, but his contract status shows that he's definitely in Nashville's plans. O'Reilly finished among the top-20 AHL scorers two years in a row - normally the kiss of death for a minor league forward. But O'Reilly recently signed a

two-year deal that seals his NHL fate. The first year is a two-way deal in 2009-10 (his transition year), and a one-way deal (his top-six chance) in 2010-2011.

That recent contract signing will make him a notable exception to Alexandre Giroux, Keith Aucoin, Jason Krog, Darren Haydar, Corey Locke, Pierre-Alexandre Parenteau, Mathieu Darche, Martin St. Pierre, Brad Moran and Dobber favourite Brett Sterling. That long list of perennial top-20 AHL scorers may see spot NHL duty but will likely never play a full NHL season. In fact, if a player ever has two high scoring AHL seasons, do not draft him...ever. It means too many quality people question his NHL ability.

Player	AHL breakthrough	Transition year	Top-six year
Kris Versteeg	06-07 - 72 pts.	07-08 - 56 games AHL	08-09 - 53 pts. NHL
		07-08 - 13 games NHL	
David Krejci	06-07 - 74 pts.	07-08 - 25 games AHL	08-09 - 73 pts. NHL
		07-08 - 56 games NHL	
Dustin Penner	04-05 - 28 pts.	05-06 - 57 games (84 pts)	06-07 - 29 goals NHL
		05-06 - 19 games NHL	
Patrick OSullivan	05-06 - 93 pts.	06-07 - 41 games AHL	07-08 - 53 pts. NHL
		06-07 - 44 games NHL	
Rich Peverly	06-07 - 68 pts.	07-08 - 45 games AHL	08-09 - 44 pts. NHL
		07-08 - 33 games NHL	
Jiri Hudler	03-04 - 49 pts.	05-06 - 76 games AHL	07-08 - 42 pts. NHL
	04-05 - 34 pts.	05-06 - 4 games NHL	

On average there are about two top-20 AHL scorers that eventually hit the NHL top six. They almost always take two years to get there. Here are the candidates this season:

Chris Bourque will be entering his transition year after a solid AHL season. Expect Bourque to play at least a dozen games with the Capitals.

I'm one of the few people who believes Artem Anisimov isn't ready. I can't emphasize this enough. He had a lights out AHL season, but he's 6'3, still needs to fill out and is a gangly

skater who will need NHL transition time. New York would be wise to split his time between Hartford and the Rangers. He has only played one NHL game. Big players always need a little more time to develop.

Nathan Gerbe and Tim Kennedy are both strong candidates for a transition year. Gerbe has stated adamantly that he will not go back to the AHL. He had a good year in Portland last season but it's doubtful he'll see a full season in Buffalo because he did little in his 10 NHL games last season. Gerbe will likely spend at least 30 games in Portland unless Buffalo run into a rash of injuries. Kennedy is likely to play the majority of the season in Portland but should see at least 15 games with the big club.

Everything in my soul is screaming against Rob Schremp flourishing in Edmonton, but all the ingredients are there. I know an excellent scout in Edmonton who believes Craig MacTavish simply can't coach young players. This alone gives
Schremp a chance. Schremp is 23, had his AHL breakthrough two years ago and saw time in both leagues last season. He is a dark horse candidate to make some NHL noise this season.

Jiri Tlusty did everything backwards. He's proven himself in the AHL but played almost a full NHL season before that. He's certainly an candidate for an NHL breakthrough but the Leafs may decide to turn this year into a transition year for him.

It wouldn't surprise me if Andrew Ebbett scored 50 points this season. The 26-year-old has developed along the lines of a skilled college player. He's had his big AHL season and showed some promise in 48 games with the Ducks last year.

The favourite for an NHL breakthrough is big LA right wing Ted Purcell. Purcell scored 83 AHL points two years ago, spent 38 games in Manchester and 40 in LA last season. He's the perfect candidate for a 50-point NHL season and is this year's AHL'er most likely to make the jump to the NHL top six.