This week we will continue to look at players who are emerging as excellent cap bargains in the AHL and can potentially help your team in the not-too-distant future. All players profiled will have a cap hit under $1 million. The idea is to find players who can help you fit more expensive stars on your roster while not sacrificing anything in terms of production.

Here are five potential bargain forwards from the Western Conference:

Roman Horak (C – Calgary)

Cap Hit: $800,000
Years Left: 2
AHL Team: Abbotsford

GP: 32
G:14
A: 5
PTS: 19
PIM: 10

Roman Horak is a highly-talented offensive player who had a tough rookie pro season a year ago. He dressed for 61 games with the Calgary Flames and had just three goals and 11 points. Fast-forward one campaign and things look much brighter for the undersized centerman as he sits third on his team with 19 points in 32 games including a club-high 14 goals.

Moving forward, Horak will have to add some strength and play with a lot more consistency if he is to make an impact at the NHL level. On the flip side, there is a lot of long-term uncertainty up front in Calgary which could present him with a great opportunity to climb the depth chart before

too much time passes. His entry-level contract runs through 2013-14 and when it expires he will probably be re-signed at a pretty cheap price since he is not a high-end prospect.

Brandon Pirri (C – Chicago)

Cap Hit: $870,000
Years Left: 2
AHL Team: Rockford

GP: 33
G: 10
A: 13
PTS: 23
PIM: 24

Brandon Pirri is another talented centerman who is on the cusp of full-time NHL duty. He has had a very successful three seasons in the AHL including 23 points in 33 games this year. There is a great opportunity in Chicago because the team lacks a true second-line pivot. Dave Bolland simply has not produced enough offensively and Patrick Kane is a natural winger. Also helping Pirri's cause is the Blackhawks' large number of bloated

contracts which have caused cap problems in recent years and will continue to do so moving forward when the new collective bargaining agreement is signed. Perhaps his cheap contract can help him land a roster spot and put him in a position to provide some much-needed support scoring.

Jonathan Audy-Marchessault (LW – Columbus)

Cap Hit: $925,000
Years Left: 3
AHL Team: Springfield

GP: 30
G: 8
A: 20
PTS: 28
PIM: 28

Over the years we have seen many minuscule forwards who possess high-end skills arrive on the scene and provide fantasy poolies with hope of becoming the next diamond in the rough. Most of them fail, but some go on to become strong contributors at the NHL level. Most of them can be picked up off the waiver wire so the cost of taking the gamble is minimal.

Jonathan Audy-Marchessault is such a player. He is a long-shot to successfully translate his production to the NHL level but what we have seen so far in the AHL has been remarkable. He played for Connecticut as an undrafted free agent last year and finished second on the team with 64 points in 76 games. Now signed with Columbus, he has stepped up his game in the first year of a three-year entry-level contract with 28 points in 30 games.

As is often the case with emerging cap bargains, opportunity is key. The Blue Jackets certainly need some firepower up front and Audy-Marchessault could provide some points if he gains traction at the highest level. Unless his game crashes and burns he should be a lock to at least get a look at some point.

{youtube}7FRsyBrSc2U{/youtube}

Johan Larsson (C – Minnesota)

Cap Hit: $870,000
Years Left: 3
AHL Team: Houston

GP: 32
G: 8
A: 10
PTS: 18
PIM: 16

Johan Larsson is a highly-regarded prospect who is having a successful rookie season in the AHL in a secondary-scoring role. There are a few prospects in Houston ahead of him in terms of offensive production but there will also be a lot of turnover in Minnesota in the coming years following the arrivals of Zach Parise and Ryan Suter who occupy a lot of salary cap space.

Larsson's combination of a sound two-way game, versatility, and a cheap contract could see him on the move to Minnesota sooner than some people think. Even if you have to wait a couple years for him to get a full-time promotion to the NHL, he is still worth owning because of his long-term potential as a strong fantasy contributor.

Patrick Maroon (LW – Anaheim)

Cap Hit: $550,000
Years Left: 1
AHL Team: Norfolk

GP: 30
G: 9
A: 11
PTS: 20
PIM: 98

A mammoth forward listed at 6'4 and 225 pounds, Patrick Maroon is once again producing stats in Norfolk that should be catching the eyes of roto league general managers. He is once again holding his own offensively in a scoring-line role with 20 total points in 30 games but his 98 PIM and physical game really stand out.

Looking at the Anaheim Ducks' depth chart, there are a pair of physical prospects in Matt Beleskey
and Devante Smith-Pelley already in the lineup and there is also intense competition for roster spots with
Kyle Palmieri

and
Peter Holland
being close to NHL-ready. But with the eventual retirement of
Teemu Selanne
and the pending unrestricted free agency of
Ryan Getzlaf
and
Corey Perry
, there will likely be roster spots available for the taking in the near future. Even in a bottom-six role, Maroon will contribute in the physical department and is talented enough to not be a liability offensively.

Previous posts from Eric Daoust:

- **Salary Cap Bargains: Part I**
- **Part II**
- Part III
- Part IV