

THE GAME OF WOLF

CUTTHROAT GOLF AT ITS FINEST

By Jack Rickard



While the popularity of the game of golf has never been higher, and with all due respect to the USGS rules committee, somewhere between your 200th and 300th round of golf it will probably dawn on you that you will NOT achieve the PAR 72 standard again today. And in fact your chances of making it through Q school and qualifying for the tour are looking grim AGAIN this season. The old game of 18 holes and 72 strokes is interesting, but at times not consuming..

Like Bridge, Chess, and Attempted

Suicide, golf can be played and enjoyed on many levels. As a result, many hundreds of side games have evolved such as 5-3-1, Chinese, Pick Up Sticks, etc. and everyone has their own favorite with specific games gaining sway in particular locales or among specific groups of golfers. My personal favorite is a game called **Wolf**, or **Lone Wolf**.

After reviewing every available book on golf games, I found the descriptions of Wolf generally vague and a lot of questions arose in the course of trying to play the game, along with the usual heated arguments regarding the “real” rules of Wolf.

Over the years I’ve played with numerous groups and surveyed every variant I could find that worked, along with some that failed most miserably. The following is a compilation of how and why I like to play Wolf. Inevitably, some Wolf veterans will present another view, usually heatedly and with due reference to both my qualifications and ancestry. Game on!

THE WHY OF WOLF.



I would rather play Wolf than any other golf game and I sport both numerous and detailed reasons why, with which it is my personal delight to bore you ad nauseum and ad infinitum herewith:

I PREFER HOLE PLAY TO MATCH PLAY IN GENERAL. In match play, too often the outcome, even of artfully handicapped matches, is apparent by the close of the fifth hole. I particularly dislike “scrambles” or any match play game that involves strings, mulligans, cars awarded on par 3s, two-putt limits, and club-length lies.

Hole play, by contrast, is really a series of 18 individual games. If you lose one, go to the next. In fact, you could play a different game each hole or on alternating holes.

WOLF IS THE IDEAL GAME FOR A MIXED NUMBER OF GOLFERS. Wolf

can be played with three, four, five, six, or even more golfers all on the same hole where allowed by the club. My absolute favorite is five-man Wolf. In fact, the game is entirely a different sport with three players than it is with four, and similarly it is an entirely different game and strategy with five for various statistical and logical reasons that will become apparent as you play the game. It is absolutely ideal for that awkward fivesome.

WOLF IS THE IDEAL GAME FOR A GROUP OF MIXED PLAYING LEVELS.

The entire handicapping system derives from the lack of sport in pitting an excellent golfer against a poor one. The game of Wolf is actually MUCH IMPROVED by a good mix of players from expert to hacker and suffers mildly in the hands of four or five evenly matched players. The strategy becomes absolutely intense with a good mix, properly handicapped, and best of all, if you have done a MISERABLE job of handicapping the match, the game suffers very little. It simply alters the strategy in partner selection and after just a few holes, the entire thing shakes out into an intense match with everyone having just as good a chance of winning as they did had it been properly handicapped in the first place.

Since it is often difficult to properly handicap a mixed set of golfers that don't play together often or sport rigorously developed club handicaps, Wolf is the IDEAL game for this situation. I have been contested vigorously on this position but even in the case of egregiously mishandicapping a match for demonstration purposes, the results were convincing even to the naysayers.



We actually took the BEST golfer one round and stroked HIM every other hole and it was an intense afternoon. So Wolf solves two of the biggest problems encountered in the typical golf outing, - an uneven mix of players and the impossibility of properly handicapping them.

WOLVES ARE INTENSE ANIMALS. The fundamental reason to play any of the variety of golf games available is to cause an interesting session by elevating the intensity and focus of your play. Wolf is the most intense and focused game available. I typically play six strokes better in a round of Wolf than I do playing any other game. Wolf has a further subtle benefit that I particularly like. You can of course bet any amount on Wolf and it will work quite well, but it has been my experience that even if you bet relatively huge sums on Wolf, in the end it is very difficult for anyone in the game to run away with it and as a result, after a great deal of “intensity” and many holes of play, relatively little money actually changes hands. It SEEMS like you are playing for houses, when you’re generally trading quarters.

THE GOOD AND BAD OF PARTNERS. Golfers are inherently competitive spirits. Were they not, they would have hobbies such as gardening or fishing, neither of which is particularly confrontational - as long as you’re not a fish. In the most common matches, two golfers square off against two other golfers and “game on.” Oddly, it has been my observation that a certain competitive spirit not only develops as the day goes on, but a particular “us vs. them” mentality sets in and becomes more pronounced as the day evolves. In some cases irritation and occasionally animosity develops between the teams even if two very good friends in everyday life are on opposing teams with near strangers as their respective partners. This is simply inherent in the competitive nature of the game. And of course this is no problem for gentlemen and scholars all. But I HAVE seen some pretty serious arguments break out among the unwashed.

Any of the cutthroat games would solve this of course, but cutthroat golf in itself can diminish enjoyment. It can be a lot of fun to have someone on your side cheering for you and in some cases dragging you down the fairway and the good side of team golf is a certain camaraderie that develops as well. A partner is an asset in golf.

Wolf is absolutely IDEAL in this. Unless you opt to be a “Lone Wolf”, you have a partner, or sometimes several, on EVERY hole. But the guy that made you money on the last hole may be the one you are striving mightily to cut this hole. Conversely, the guy who stole your golf pants last hole, might be the only thing keeping you in the game this hole.

Ultimately, Wolf IS a very cutthroat game; partner selection is “simply business.” But at any given moment, you have a partner or perhaps two, and you NEED them badly. Ergo, all the benefits, emotional and strategic, of having a partner, but as the teams change EVERY hole, no “us vs them” mentality has an opportunity to set in. To survive in the pack, you pretty much have to get along with everyone.

WOLF IS A STRATEGIC GAME. Golf itself offers some strategy as to how to safely, or heroically play any particular position, lie, or hole. But Wolf is INTENSELY and richly strategic in a way I have not found in any other golf game and few games of any sort short of intercontinental nuclear conflict. The order of tee-off rotates every hole and DOES make a difference. Who is stroking on any particular hole makes a huge difference in selecting a partner. Who has been playing well the last hole or two must be taken into account. Whether it is a long hole or a short par three when it is your turn to lead off as Wolf is actually quite huge. How YOU have been playing the past few holes makes a difference. How many holes are left and who owns the press can loom very large at some points in the game. In the game of Wolf, your MIND is always on the move, measuring every change of wind, every wave of grass, and every wiggle of every player in your match. If it isn’t, you can actually shoot pretty good golf that day and still go home the big loser. If you are mentally alert, you can be in the middle of the game, but lead the pack in points at the end. Good physical play and execution are as important as in any golf game, but beyond any golf game I am aware of - strategy is crucial.

EVERY STROKE

COUNTS. Wolf is a game of



COUNTS. Wolf is a game of total strokes. The scores of the wolf and his partner are totaled, and the two best scores of the remaining pack members are totaled and compared against the Wolf team. As a result, every stroke of every player is of critical importance. In many golf games, the high handicapper of the group can play five or six holes without the outcome of his play ever being counted or having any impact on the game at all. He's basically trailing around, whacking balls and watching other people play golf – a lonely audience of one. In Wolf, he may be putting for a nine on this hole, but everyone is generally waiting with baited breath to see if he makes it. You just don't pick up in this game.



THE DOWNSIDE OF WOLF. Since I'm such a Wolf advocate, it might be surprising that there are some things I don't like about Wolf. There aren't many, but there are some.

Generally, Wolf just isn't a very good game where pace of play is an important factor. On some courses, this is a big deal. The tee-off order is very rigid and at times confusing and this slows things down slightly. As mentioned, every stroke counts and so there is little "pickup and move on because this one doesn't count anyway." Scorekeeping and reporting at each hole incur some overhead. And due to the intensity and often very close scores on each hole, it is generally best to adhere to the full USGS rules of golf to avoid controversies. And I personally feel the five man game is the very best form of Wolf. All of these conspire to slow the game a bit. IF you're all aware of it and hustle a bit, it can actually move at a FASTER pace than most games. But certain elements of the game tend to slow it slightly.

Compared to two two-man teams playing low ball/low total, it is a bit complicated and the scorekeeping task is nontrivial.

PLAYING WOLF - THE PAYOFF.

Believe it or not, Wolf is actually NOT a hard game to score. Points are awarded to one or more players each hole who win the hole. Players who are on the losing team don't technically "lose" any points, they just don't gain any. By way of a simple example, let's assume we are playing for one point per hole. The first to tee off (Wolf) selects a partner, and at the end of the hole the Wolf and his partner win the hole. They EACH are awarded one point or "dot." The two on the losing team simply don't get any dots for that hole.

The reason many people find Wolf scoring complicated is that they don't understand how you can have various teams all day and keep track of who owes who. It is not that hard, each player simply collects points as they win or lose. But in describing this, we have to start at the end, or payoff, otherwise most of Wolf won't make sense.



Let's look at the end of a typical day of Wolf:

Player 1	21 points
Player 2	19 points

Player 2 10 points
Player 3 14 points
Player 4 11 points

Let's further assume we are playing for a dollar a point (10 cents or 10 dollars work equally well). Player 2 would pay Player 1 for 2 points or \$2. Players 3 and 4 are "beneath" 2 so player 2 owes them nothing.

Similarly, Player 3 pays everyone above him: in this case \$5 to player 2 ($19-14=5$) and \$7 to player 1. Player 4 pays everybody: \$3 goes to player 3, \$8 to player 2, and \$10 to player 1.

Note that even though player 2 payed player 1 \$2, he collected \$5 from player 3 and \$8 from player 4. Thus $5+8-2=\$11$ net. Basically, and key, you pay everybody with more points than you.

The important point here is that, on any given hole, if ONE player gets ONE point, and nobody else got ANY, at the end, that player gets paid \$1 by EVERYBODY.

PLAYING ORDER.

The tee-off order on Wolf is in a set order, but rotates each hole. All players always play behind the same player for the entire round, but the player teeing off as Wolf changes each hole. To establish playing order, have each player provide a golf ball to one designee who then simply casts the balls across the surface of the tee-box six or eight feet. The ball closest to the designee becomes Player 1, the next closest ball Player 2, and so on.

On the first hole, Player 1 would then be the Wolf and would tee-off first. Each player then tee's off in order. On the second hole, Player 2 tee's off as Wolf, Player 3 following and so on until Player 1 is last. On the third hole, Player 3 tee's off as Wolf, and again, everyone tee's off in order. This rotation continues throughout the round.



Order is important because of the way partners are selected by the Wolf. For this reason, any "provisional" balls MUST be struck immediately. If Player 2 hits one that might be out of bounds, it is important he hit a provisional ball BEFORE Player 3 tee's off.

PARTNER SELECTION – THE WOLF IN CONTROL.

After teeing off, the Wolf steps back to observe further teebox action. The next player in order then tees off. The Wolf observes this teeshot from the teebox area. He cannot go down the fairway to check the lie or result, but must observe the tee shot and its resultant lie from the tee-box. He can then select the player as his partner or he can pass on that player. If he does neither, at the point where the NEXT player hits his shot, he has effectively passed on the first player, and can then either select or pass on the player now teeing off.





At the point where the Wolf has selected a partner, the remaining players become the opposing team, whether there are two of them, or three of them, or even more.

If the Wolf selects NO ONE as his partner, he is said to have gone “Lone Wolf”. At that point, he is playing against the pack for the low ball score. Any one of the other players can score lower than the wolf to defeat him, or in the case of a tie, to tie him.

In the case where a Wolf selects a partner, the game is “low total” where the two BEST scores of all remaining off team members are matched against the two scores of the Wolf and his partner. The lowest total receives the points.

Note that in five man wolf, ALL THREE of the off partners each get a point in the event of their success, and in the case of the Wolf and partner winning, they each get a point for a total of two. This would appear to be inequitable but it actually isn't. Wolf and partner each get a point, but at payoff, this would be from THREE opponents (\$6). If Wolf and partner lose, it is true that THREE people dot, but at payoff it comes from TWO (\$6).

In the event that the Wolf DOES choose a partner, the selectee then has an option. He does NOT have to accept the Wolf. He can opt to REJECT the election and become the Lone Wolf himself. I refer to this somewhat pictorially as “throwing the wolf under the bus” but most simply call it “ditching the wolf” or “rejecting.” If the selectee opts to reject, he consequently BECOMES Lone Wolf, playing low ball against the rest of the pack just as if he had been the Wolf himself and gone Lone Wolf.

The one oddity here is in the case of a three-man Wolf match. Someone is ALWAYS the Lone Wolf. The Wolf teeing off can select either of the other two as partners, or he can of course go Lone Wolf. If he selects someone as partner, the remaining player IS defacto the Lone Wolf.

SCORING

As described, the team with the lowest total is awarded the points, initially one point per player. The opposing team receives no points of course. In the case of a Lone Wolf, the Lone Wolf if he wins, is awarded both points – basically all the points set for the hole. If he loses as Lone Wolf, then EACH of the remaining pack members are awarded the normal point values.

This is THE aspect of Wolf that causes the most questions and misunderstandings. In a

standard four man wolf match, for example, if the Wolf wins, he gains two points but if he loses THREE other players each gain one point. This appears to be even worse in five man wolf. If the wolf wins, he gets two points, but if he loses, FOUR other players each gain one point.

But it is not precisely so. Let's review the PAYOFF section and assume the entire match consists of one hole played at one point and each point is worth a dollar.

LONE WOLF WINS

Wolf	2 points
Player 2	0 points
Player 3	0 points
Player 4	0 points
Player 5	0 points

At payoff, wolf wins \$2 from EACH player for a total of EIGHT DOLLARS.

LONE WOLF LOSES

Wolf	0 points
Player 2	1 point
Player 3	1 point
Player 4	1 point
Player 5	1 point

At payoff, Wolf pays \$1 to each of 4 players for a total of FOUR DOLLARS.

This holds true at any level of press, and for any number of players. In theory, the Wolf could be playing against nine players. He would either owe \$9 or collect \$18. The Lone Wolf bonus is simply doubled points.

One variant often played is that of "declared" Lone Wolf. In the event that the Wolf, PRIOR to teeing off, announces that he is going Lone Wolf no matter what, he would receive THREE points rather than two. If the points had been pressed to eight for example, a Lone Wolf would normally receive 16 points, and a declared Lone Wolf would receive 24 points. It's a hard game. Pack a lunch.

THE PRESS.

At any time, the points can be "pressed" to essentially double the bet. At the first press, for example, the point would be doubled to two points, and the Lone Wolf bonus consequently to four points. At the next press, the points are doubled to four points for a normal match, and consequently eight points for a successful lone wolf.



As partners change each hole, generally the only one who can press is the player with the LEAST points, who is termed to the "crippled wolf" and is said to "own the press".

In this way, the player doing least well can either limit the game, and the resulting loss, by not pressing, or conversely increase the stakes to catch up during the remaining holes, depending on his aggressiveness or reticence as the mood strikes.

A press must be announced prior to the first shot off the tee-box. One press is allowed PER HOLE.

There are endless variants to limit the press (one press per side, etc.) and indeed some play with no press at all. But the press can be very effective at intensifying the game, particularly toward the last few holes.

TIE HOLES

Ties occur quite commonly in Wolf. Normally all points for the hole are simply carried to the next hole (a push). The winner of that hole would not only win their normal points, but also the points carried from the previous hole.

This can cause some confusion. In the event that four points are in the game (by previous press) and a player goes Lone Wolf, the point doubles to eight points if he is successful. If he is tied, you don't push eight points, but rather carry forward the four points currently in the game. The entire concept of Lone Wolf play is that the Wolf is getting both his points (4) and his partners points (4). So in the event of tie with a Lone Wolf, the 4 point value would be carried.

This introduces a certain random element into Wolf. Since partners change with each hole, it is sort of randomly fortuitous for the team that ultimately wins the points from earlier holes – in some cases three or four earlier consecutively tied holes. Play hard.

It is not required to carry or push the points. In fact, when I play we rarely push the points but simply allow them to expires as “no blood” on that hole. Why? Scorekeeping is already a bit of overhead, and they generally make me keep score. No push is simply easier to score.

THE ROLE OF SCOREKEEPER.

The scorekeeper has a bit of a complex task keeping track of a number of bits of very important information. He must announce several items of importance prior to the tee-off, or certainly prior to the second person teeing off, because they can have a dramatic impact on the Wolf's selection of a partner. These items are:

1. Who is the Wolf for this hole.
2. Order of play (if necessary – generally everybody knows the order after about two holes).
3. Who is receiving handicap strokes for this hole.
4. Point value of the hole (press status)
5. Who owns the press (crippled wolf).
6. Current score of all players if requested.

Of this, the most important is actually the strokes. Who is stroking is critical information to the wolf.

HANDICAPPING

Wolf can be handicapped, or not as you wish. It can also be handicapped well or poorly, and ultimately matters little. We once, as an experiment, played an entire round with the LOWEST



round with the LOWEST handicapper stroking every hole and no one else stroking at all. It altered the game strategy a bit, but wound up a thoroughly enjoyable and actually quite fair round. Of course, the



low handicapper went Lone Wolf a lot, but only really had the opportunity to do so every fifth hole. After a couple of holes where he was selected and opted to throw the wolf under the bus and Lone Wolf it, no one picked him as a partner for the rest of the day. He was kind of the “joker” in the deck for the rest of the day. And the wolf, who selected the partner, was at a DISADVANTAGE each hole. But this made those who WEREN’T the wolf have a very good hole. Because of the rotation, everyone got a pretty equal chance at winning. Incredibly, the low handicapper going Lone Wolf on his turn, even with a stroke, faired poorly two or three times in a row and quit doing it. He did pretty much win the game at the end of the day, but not by as much as you would think.

So Wolf is the game BEST SUITED to poor handicapping. Obviously, it is better to handicap it properly and accurately if you can. If you have a couple of high handicappers that actually stroke TWO strokes on a hole or two, it is a riot.

Generally, you handicap off of the low handicapper. He receives zero strokes and other players are awarded strokes as a matter of difference.

Player 1	Handicap 7	Zero Strokes
Player 2	Handicap 11	4 Strokes
Player 3	Handicap 14	7 Strokes
Player 4	Handicap 15	8 Strokes
Player 5	Handicap 28	21 strokes.

Note that player five would stroke every hole, and on three holes would stroke TWO strokes. He may be the worst golfer in four counties, but he would be a sought partner on those holes.

WOLF – THE FINER POINTS

The first few games of Wolf, while delightful, can be a bit confusing. There is a lot going on here. As you get into the game, it becomes a thing of beauty. The heart of Wolf is actually the heart and soul of golf. And that is, that even great golfers have bad holes and even miserable golfers occasionally drop in the miracle birdy. Tiger Woods has blasted them so deep into the kack that a gallery full of avid fans and half a dozen forecaddies and tournament officials could not even find the ball. I’ve watched him triple bogey on national television right in front of God and the Highway Patrol.

Conversely, high handicappers will land the occasional birdie under the overarching rubrick that “even a blind hog gets an acorn now and again.” When you combine four, or even better five players in hole play, some very strange things begin to happen with odd cosmic forces at play.

One of the best matches I was ever in was in Phoenix. We had a fivesome and no one quite knew what to do about it. I suggested a game of Wolf. We had one really scratch golfer, a couple of ten handicaps, and a couple in the throes of twentysomething. We handicapped it accordingly, stroking off the low handicapper. In the first five holes, every single player, excepting myself, had chosen the scratch golfer as a partner, and in fact, the scratch golfer had Lone Wolfed it – chosing himself as well. At the end of five holes, I had pointed on ALL five holes. The scratch golfer owned the press and didn’t have a point. And everyone

was totally bewildered. What was going on?

I stopped the game, and did the best I could to explain what was happening to them strategically in the basic five minute version of Wolf 101. Starting on hole six, GAME ON. By the turn, these guys were fighting for their lives and by sundown Wolf had four new and avid fans. While as it turns out I lost about \$60, it was undoubtedly one of the most rewarding rounds I've ever had in every respect. I'd pay \$120 to do it again.

Handicap strokes are huge. But numerics are as well. The simple act of having three golfers against two is actually of enormous significance. On every hole, somebody is going to have a good hole, somebody else is going to have a trainwreck in the fairway, or at least within sight of a fairway, or at least on the same property as one of the fairways somewhere, and everyone else will be sorted out somewhere in between. The team having three scores with the inevitability of throwing one of them away and matching their BEST two against whatever does befall the Wolf team, has a bit of an advantage. Conversely, there is no doubt that having the ability to determine who is your partner based on how well or poorly they struck the drive is the command position.



The Lone Wolf aspect of Wolf is its most endearing variable. But it is also a trap. In going Lone Wolf, you are converting essentially a low total game to a game of low ball. And you are converting the number of games you are playing from a 2 on 3 or 2 on 2 total to a 1 on 3 or 1 on 4. Statistically, while you might kill two of these guys, the third is going to come out of the woods and kill you. If he's stroking too, you're also under water with no burial ceremony necessary. You may have a great drive off the teebox, and on a par 3, with your ball snug to the pin, it is indeed a commanding position. But on a Par 5, there is a surprising amount of golf left after the driving is done. And having four against you is actually more of a deal than you would think. SOMEBODY is going to do well.

Secondly, all is not quite what it appears on the teebox. I call this the THINGS CHANGE factor. Remember that selections are made FROM the teebox. The guy that looked like he was totally in a hazard and basically out of the hole, on driving up to the area in the little buggy, it is found that his ball actually hit the red stick and bounded out just a few inches off the fairway – a much better position than we thought. And Mr. Big Stick that poked it 1.5 miles down the center of the fairway, is found to be laying in a divot large enough to hide a golf bag in. With a 6-iron BACKHOE maybe he'll be there to help you.

Player selection is strategic at all times. And you have to learn by doing. Let's say I tee-off, and I'm not only the wolf, but I'm stroking. But I hit a wounded duck left hook into the woods on the left – red staked. Despite my stroke, I need a little help. Mr. Club Champ is next on the teebox, and hits one 260 down the middle of the fairway. He looks a little puzzled when I passed on him immediately. Next up, a high handicapper, but also stroking, spansk one into heavy rough, possible deep weeds on the right. "There's MY partner", I announced. Everyone gasped, with the exception of those who howled with mirth and immediately started counting their windfall winnings. The remaining players teed off, and there we were two of us in the weeds against one great shot and two pretty good ones. It looks like I had made a gargantuan strategic blunder and the three opponents literally

danced into their carts to drive away and enjoy the bone marrow and carnage.

Coming off the teebox, Paul, my selectee says “I don’t know if I should feel honored or abused. I guess you drug me down in the mud with you. Why in the world didn’t you pick old Howitzer Calaway?” “Because I want to win this hole Paul and here’s how we’re going to do it. Let’s go find your ball, and whatever it takes, - forget the green - let’s get you back into the fairway.” He laughed a little, and said “OK– let’s go get em partner.”

As it turns out, we did find his ball – not quite as lost as everyone thought and he did punch a 7-iron back into the fairway. The hole was a long par five. I took my penalty and also hit into the fairway. I would love to report that we each birdied the hole of course. But it wouldn’t make the point reality did. Paul double bogeyed the hole and so did I. We shot a 7-7 for a 6-6 net. Mr. Howitzer did in fact PAR the hole with a 5 but his partners struggled through some greenside bunkers and their BEST was a 7 also for a 12 total. We tied the hole and no blood was shed in anger.

From my perspective, starting lost in the woods, we had fought them off and that is a BIG win. If I had made my putt we would have actually taken points. But I missed it for the tie. Paul was relieved. What happened?

Let’s say that I had done the obvious thing. I was in the woods on my tee shot and needed help. Next at bat is a good golfer and he gets a great drive. My OBVIOUS choice is to pick him. But is it? Why would he want ME for a partner? He’s in great shape down the middle and I’m in the woods. His correct strategy would be to throw me under the bus and Lone Wolf it himself converting the game to a low ball. At that point, I’m outta the game – helplessly hoping for good things from my partners. And I haven’t seen ANY of their drives yet. It’s not likely that I can come out of the woods, even with a stroke, and win against a better golfer that is 260 yards down the middle.



In picking Paul, three really good things happened. No one knows if we can find his ball, so it would be VERY poor strategy, particularly in the face of the big drive down the middle, for HIM to throw me under the bus and go Lone Wolf. And if he DOES, I then have Mr. 260 yards on MY TEAM and he has no option to escape this fate.

In picking Paul, I have combined the only two handicap strokes in the game on this hole. One plus one equals two, even in golf.



Third, and perhaps most importantly, in picking Paul, and in his forced acceptance of me, we have just converted the game from a low ball situation with Mr. 260 all over us, to a LOW TOTAL game effectively saddling Mr. 260 with one of the other players – at this point total unknowns. One of them COULD have birdied the hole. Or not. That’s what an unknown is. But it considerably improved MY position, and Paul’s for that

matter. And we went from hopeless to having a chance to play out the hole and have something good happen. As it turns out, it worked out that way. Mr. 260's par was DILUTED by his partner's 7's. Paul and I actually had 7s as well but we were stroking for 6's – a small and generally pathetic margin, but enough between us to tie the hole.

Not only do you pick YOUR partner, but by doing so you determine who else gets partnered with whom. And you determine whether it is a low ball game or a low total score game. And the entire fivesome is dynamic in so many minor ways. I LOVE sand – I sometimes target it. Paul doesn't do badly in it. This is unfortunately probably because both of us have so much EXPERIENCE in it. This hole had a lot of it. One of the other players was notoriously bad in it. Just because it was 500 yards away from the teebox, I still had to keep it in mind. If water were the game instead, the strategy might have been different.

So there was a LOT going on here. It's not just pick the best golfer, or the best drive for that matter. I could have had both as an easy pick on the drive right behind me. But it would have undoubtedly cost me a couple of bucks. He would have Lone Wolfed and none of us could have done anything but watch him play golf with our money.

This is what I call “putting lipstick on a pig.” It's still a pig. But it looks a little better than it did, and if you can fight to a draw, go play the next hole. Ninety percent of winning in golf is just not losing so much.



So on to the next hole. Mr. 260 is a little frustrated and I don't blame him. He played the toughest hole on the course. He parred it. Nobody else did. And he didn't get a single point. Penniless, he tees off, again on a long par 4, and announces he's going to go lone wolf before anybody else hits a ball. This was unnecessary. He could have waited until we all hit, and lacking any prospects Lone Wolfed anyway. As it turns out it didn't matter. He lost that hole as well. Why? He did have a good drive. And he is clearly the better golfer.

Well the answer is, he had a little trouble, and bogeyed the Par 4 for a 5. Paul parred the hole with a stroke for a net birdie. It wasn't even close. I had a handsome 6 again with no strokes, but as part of the “rest of the pack” I shared Paul's good fortune and graciously accepted the point right along with him. What happened?

It's kind of a Wolf Law of Big Numbers. Good golfers with good drives lose holes because they still have to play after the drive, and there are a LOT of golfers against them, in this case four. The statistical odds that ONE of us is going to have a pretty good hole, out of four golfers, are pretty good. That it was the WORST golfer among us that killed him on this hole I'm sure was meager consolation.

But it gets better. On the next hole, a middlin Par 3, Paul is of course the Wolf. He puts one on the green about 12 feet from the cup. Catching on a bit, he watches carefully as two of us go scuba diving, and two others are handy but off the green. (Mr. 260 hit the water REALLY HARD if that's any help. He can really hit it.) Paul elects to go Lone Wolf. Paul, not a proud putter actually, misses and rolls fully six feet past. But he does luckily make it coming back for a par. The only par as it turns out. And consequently, he collects two handy points while the rest of us are feeling glum.

What's going on? In three holes, the worst golfer among us has tied one, won one, and then won a double point? Mr. 260 doesn't need a pencil yet.

Well, on a middlin par 3, if you're 12 feet from the cup, there's about 12 feet of golf left in the game. On a 425 yard par 4, at 260 there's approximately 165 yards of golf left. For benefit of those who rode the short bus to a public school, the 12 feet is considered generally to be the lesser of the two. While there were still four golfers against Paul, he simply had a distance edge on a par 3 that you just can't get from the teebox on a par 4, and never on a par 5. For one of the handies to come back and tie him was entirely plausible, but didn't happen in this case. And even for Paul, it's tough to three putt from 12 feet.

Further, on a par 3 he was much better able to ascertain the exact situation from the teebox because it was closer and he could see and hear the sound of running water in two cases.

Ok, yes, I was the other wet one. Not enough lipstick.

Among veteran Wolf players, you will see quite a few Lone Wolf situations on par threes, almost none on par fives, and a real fight over an occasional one on a par four.

FINAL NOTES

Again, most of the confusion about wolf comes from the scoring and to walk it through in your mind, you must go to the parking lot payoff arithmetic, NOT to the scoring. Calculate who would owe whom how much after ONE hole and all the logic becomes clearer.

The most underrated and overlooked aspect of wolf is the statistical advantage of having the greater number of players on your team.

SUMMARY RULES FOR WOLF

1. Select player tee-off order by lot.
2. Wolf is the first to tee off.



3. As each player tees off, Wolf has the take/pass option. Once passed, he can't go back. If he fails to elect before the next player strikes, he has default passed.
4. Wolf does not have to pick ANY player as partner and has option of going "Lone Wolf".
5. Any player picked as partner by Wolf has option of rejecting and going Lone Wolf himself.
6. Scoring is low total score, wolf and partner against two best of the remaining pack. Lone wolf option is inherently low ball rather than low total.
7. One point for each player on winning team. Lone Wolf get's BOTH points that would have been awarded to his "team". Blind lone wolf does NOT double again, it simply adds an additional standard point.
8. Player with least points (the crippled wolf) owns the press.
9. Wolf rotates with each hole in tee-off order.
10. Scorekeeper announces wolf, strokes, score and press status to start each hole.
11. At payoff, pay difference between your points and theirs to EACH and EVERY player with more points than yourself.