

Bubble bursts again

Coast Guard stops man in hydro pod third time

By REBECCA PICCARDO

Staff writer

The saga of “bubble man” Reza Baluchi — the endurance athlete who has attempted to reach Bermuda inside his homemade “hydro pod” bubble — continues.

The Iranian-born Baluchi made his third try in July. He was stopped by the U.S. Coast Guard and committed to a Jacksonville psychiatric hospital for evaluation under the Florida Mental Health Act, commonly known as the Baker Act.

On his two previous tries, the Coast Guard stopped him off the coast of Florida without incident. But during his latest attempt, Coast Guard officials said Baluchi, 44, “pulled out a

knife, held it to his chest” and threatened to kill himself if they didn’t let him continue his journey, according to a Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office report.

When Baluchi was interviewed by Jacksonville authorities, he denied ever putting a knife to his chest.

Reached by phone Thursday, Baluchi said: “Why would I want to kill myself? I am a survivor.”

During the interview with authorities, Baluchi said that when the Coast Guard warned him he could die inside his bubble, he said he “was prepared to die” for his cause — raising money for abused children.

Jacksonville authorities determined he posed a danger to himself and took him to Jacksonville Medical Health Resource Center. He was released shortly thereafter.

Baluchi was about 90 miles off the coast of Jacksonville when the Coast

Guard ended his trip. He said they shot at his buoyancy balls and sank his bubble.

“Everything got messed up. My bubble is at the bottom of the ocean,” he said. “They had no right to sink my bubble, that was my personal property.”

Baluchi’s first bubble was destroyed during his first attempt in 2014. He spent most of 2015 working on a crab boat based out of Cape Canaveral and used his earnings to build his second bubble, but he’s burned through most of that money by now.

Last week, he drove to Seattle and lined up a job on another fishing boat that starts in December, he said. But he’s not done with South Florida.

“I’m coming back to build another bubble,” he said.

*rpicardo@sunsentinel.com or
954-356-4544*